

SOME ROGUES AND VAGABONDS OF DICKENS

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"THE ENGLAND OF DICKENS," ETC.



CECIL PALMER
FORTY NINE
CHANDOS
STREET
W.C.2

FIRST
EDITION
1927
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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY PURNELL AND SONS
PAULTON, SOMERSET, ENGLAND

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INTRODUCTION

SOME people complain of Dickens that his books have no plots. They surely speak in ignorance. The matter with Dickens in this respect is that he so overburdened his stories with plots as to make it somewhat difficult to unravel them. On the other hand Dickens's stories are so full of wonderful characterisation and interesting incident which absorb all our attention that we really do not pay much heed to the plot, which has become, in consequence, of quite secondary importance.

But plots there are in all Dickens's books, and plots in plenty (even *Pickwick* has a plot, in which Jingle is the central figure). Take the almost classic example which the novel *David Copperfield* presents to us. Here the story centring round Little Em'ly and her lover Steerforth is unaffected by the story of the machinations of Uriah Heep in the Wickfield household; and at the same time the adventures of Mr. Micawber in search of something to turn up are free of the other two stories, except that in the end he plays a part in the unmasking of the villainy of "the Heep of infamy".

It is the same with Little Nell; she takes her course through the fair land of England undisturbed by the story of Dick Swiveller and the Brasses. In *Dombey and Son* the story of Carker, culminating in his elopement with Mrs. Dombey, has only the slightest connection with little Paul, Florence, her boy lover, and dear old Captain Cuttle. *Bleak House* is practically two stories, the one about a Public wrong, Chancery; the other about a Private wrong, Lady Dedlock's secret—good plots both. I might continue the list to the point of weariness; we can all supply other illustrations.

I have commenced these opening remarks with a few words concerning the many plots to be found even in one story, because it is mostly with plots that Rogues and Vagabonds

are concerned; and if in his treatment of such characters, and the plots woven round them, Dickens is found to be somewhat theatrical, we must call to mind the great fascination the stage held for him, not only in his early days but through the whole of his life. "The villain of the piece" was an essential part of the drama of Dickens's day, and thus it became also an important factor in the story he had to tell. The footlights illumined all his stories, but behind its flare, and brilliantly visible through the red and blue fire, was a living reality that acclaimed the genius of the writer, and witnessed his passing from the stage of caricaturist to that of realist.

As a realist Dickens probed the gloomiest recesses of human nature, and faced the most difficult problems of his day; but he never presented anything that was repulsive or vulgar. Dickens always felt it his bounden duty to seek out the good that is inherent in even the basest of mankind. He never saw even the most sordid thing in life without the knowledge that just a little compassion would kindle the spark of better feeling that was hidden away, and it is just this simple charm of humanity that is the hall mark of his greatness. The most sordid of his criminals give proof of this. In *Oliver Twist* are some outstanding examples; what a wonderful creation is Nancy, the good angel in the den of vice, the shining example of the good possessed by every mortal. Sikes, too, surely had one redeeming feature in his callous soul: his love for Nancy, and his disinclination to hear tales of her treachery. "There ain't a stauncher hearted girl going," he asserted; and although she suffered brutal murder at his hands, that must always be remembered to his credit. Fagin, too, was not without a spark of decency when he warned Oliver to take heed of Sikes and to do his every bidding, for he "thinks nothing of blood when his own is up".

Tragedy is but the threshold of comedy; laughter is born of tears; and so, following the custom of old melodrama, laughter and tears follow even the vilest of the rogues and vagabonds in the pages of Dickens, and thus are the horrors of vile association tempered with the humour of genius, as these stories of the lives of some of the most famous figures in fiction will abundantly testify.

In this volume I have endeavoured to put before the reader, and I believe it is the first attempt to do so, the plain story of the intrigues of Dickens's rogues and the wiles

of many of his vagabonds, for all vagabonds are not rogues. And just as it is in real life, so it is in Dickens's fiction; hardly a rogue works singly, and vagabonds mostly wander in pairs. That has enabled me to present in the fifteen chapters of this book more than thirty rogues and vagabonds. I have chosen these as types, ranging from the beloved vagabond, Mrs. Jarley, to the cold and calculating murderer, Jonas Chuzzlewit. The cheat, the forger, the hypocrite, the thief, the fawner, the merely-crafty rogue, are all represented and pay tribute to the great versatility of their creator.

Although there appears to be a decided disinclination on the part of Dickens's critics to touch more than lightly on the many villains that hold the stage in the Dickens review, I have refrained in this volume from any attempt at criticism. Magwitch, whom I hold to be the one sympathetic rogue in all the realm of fiction, is not even mentioned by the most appreciative and the most understanding of all modern critics, Mr. G. K. Chesterton. He entirely overlooks Carker in his excellent appreciation of *Dombey and Son*. Bradley Headstone is certainly mentioned, but here he goes so far as to acclaim him successful in capturing our sympathies, with which I must firmly and politely decline to agree. No critical estimate can I find of Jingle, or of Tigg, in either of his two volumes of Dickens criticism. What an opportunity is thus opened for an entertaining volume by a student of rascality and crime!

There are many of Dickens's rogues and vagabonds missing from my list. The reader will probably thank me for purposely omitting those brutal murderers Sikes and Rudge. I have also likewise crowded out Slinkton, the character founded on Wainwright; and that intolerable and, to me unintelligible woman, Hortense, French maid to Lady Dedlock and murderer of Tulkinghorn. She had her origin in the notorious Mrs. Manning whom Dickens saw hanged in 1849. Public hangings were a feature of those days, but Dickens's impassioned letter to *The Times*, after witnessing this degrading spectacle, had the effect of putting an end to such exhibitions. Blandois, otherwise Rigaud, was another murderer, although his crime was committed before the opening of the story of *Little Dorrit*; his lively machinations in the house of Clennam, the head of which herself (Mrs. Clennam) was a rogue of no mean order, make interesting reading; but I have perforce had to sacrifice him (and her) in favour of Montague Tigg. The

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Lammles, husband and wife, Captain Waters and Sir Mulberry Hawk have their place in the category of adventurers, but I have preferred the company of Jingle and Chevy Slyme.

Dennis, the hangman, with a constant desire to "work off" anybody who came in his way, and who showed himself such an arrant coward when the time came for his own "trussing up", is another intriguing character who will not be found within. Stagg, the blind man, who would have dared even to murder had he not lacked the courage, is one of the great grotesques worthy of a place beside Wegg and Quilp, but as I have selected them he unfortunately must go, and the head of "the kinchin lay", Noah Claypole, has only been omitted from the chapter on "Artful Dodgers" in favour of some more engaging members of his class.

SOME ROGUES AND VAGABONDS OF DICKENS

CHAPTER ONE

THE GREAT AND WONDERFUL MERDLE

I

MR. MERDLE'S COMPLAINT

I DO not believe there was ever written a more masterly account of an arrant scoundrel, than that which Dickens created in *Little Dorrit*. It is a striking example of the wonderful characterisation of Dickens, that this really minor character in the book should be so complete; many another author would have found sufficient in Mr. Merdle to have made him the subject of a separate novel.

We have probably little interest for Mr. Merdle himself when reading the book for the first time; his true inwardness is not apparent until the dramatic end of his career is reached; we are throughout reminded that Mr. Merdle is suffering from a complaint, and we do not glean what is the nature of it; we never suspect that it is Forgery and Robbery. Even Physician could not enlighten either Bar or Bishop.

“I can find nothing the matter with Mr. Merdle. He has the constitution of a rhinoceros, the digestion of an ostrich, and the concentration of an oyster. As to nerves, Mr. Merdle is of a cool temperament, and not a sensitive man: is about as invulnerable, I should say, as Achilles. How such a man should suppose himself unwell without reason, you may think strange. But I have found nothing

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the matter with him. He may have some deep-seated recondite complaint. I can't say. I only say, that at present I have not found it out.””

It is not until the end that we learn the real nature of Mr. Merdle's complaint was simply—

‘Forgery and Robbery. He, the uncouth object of such wide-spread adulation, the sinner at great men's feasts, the roc's egg of great ladies' assemblies, the subduer of exclusiveness, the leveller of pride, the patron of patrons, the bargainer with a Minister for Lordships of the Circumlocution Office, the recipient of more acknowledgment within some ten or fifteen years, at most, than had been bestowed in England upon all peaceful public benefactors, and upon all the leaders of all the Arts and Sciences, with all their works to testify for them, during two centuries at least—he, the shining wonder, the new constellation to be followed by the wise men bringing gifts, until it stopped over certain carrion at the bottom of a bath and disappeared—was simply the greatest Forger and the greatest Thief that ever cheated the gallows.’

Then are our senses quickened, and we turn again to the pages devoted to the Merdles with a growing consciousness of the writer's meaning.

‘Mr. Merdle was immensely rich; a man of prodigious enterprise; a Midas without the ears, who turned all he touched to gold. He was in everything good, from banking to building. He was in Parliament, of course. He was in the City, necessarily. He was Chairman of this, Trustee of that, President of the other. The weightiest of men had said to projectors, “Now, what name have you got? Have you got Merdle?” And, the reply being in the negative, had said “Then I won't look at you.” . . .

‘He did not shine in company; he had not very much to say for himself; he was a reserved man, with a broad, overhanging, watchful head, that particular kind of dull red colour in his cheeks which is rather stale than fresh, and a somewhat uneasy expression about his coat-cuffs, as if they were in his confidence, and had reasons for being anxious to hide his hands. In the little he said, he was a pleasant man enough; plain, emphatic about public and

private confidence, and tenacious of the utmost deference being shown by every one, in all things, to Society. In this same Society (if that were it which came to his dinners, and to Mrs. Merdle's receptions and concerts), he hardly seemed to enjoy himself much, and was mostly to be found against walls and behind doors. Also when he went out to it, instead of its coming home to him, he seemed a little fatigued, and upon the whole rather more disposed for bed; but he was always cultivating it nevertheless, and always moving in it, and always laying out money on it with the greatest liberality.'

II

THE MERDLE DINNERS

The wonderful dinners of the great and wonderful Merdle are a feature in his history, and indeed on the first reading of the story we are inclined to pay more attention to the guests than to the host and hostess, for here were gathered all the great of Bar, of Treasury, of Church, Admiralty and Circumlocution.

'Commons and magnates from the Lords, magnates from the bench and magnates from the bar, Bishop magnates, Treasury magnates, Horse Guards magnates, Admiralty magnates—all the magnates that keep us going, and sometimes trip us up.

"I am told," said Bishop magnate to Horse Guards, "that Mr. Merdle has made another enormous hit. They say a hundred thousand pounds."

Horse Guards had heard two.

Treasury had heard three.

Bar, handling his persuasive double eye-glass, was by no means clear but that it might be four. It was one of those happy strokes of calculation and combination, the result of which it was difficult to estimate.

Brother Bellows . . . could only tell them in passing that he had heard it stated, with great appearance of truth, as being worth, from first to last, half-a-million of money.

Admiralty said Mr. Merdle was a wonderful man. Treasury said he was a new power in the country, and would be able to buy up the whole House of Commons.

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Bishop said he was glad to think that this wealth flowed into the coffers of a gentleman who was always disposed to maintain the best interests of Society.

Society had everything it could want, and could not want, for dinner. It had everything to look at, and everything to eat, and everything to drink. It is to be hoped it enjoyed itself; for Mr. Merdle's own share of the repast might have been paid for with eighteenpence. Mrs. Merdle was magnificent. The chief butler was the next magnificent institution of the day. He was the stateliest man in company. He did nothing, but he looked on as few other men could have done. He was Mr. Merdle's last gift to Society. Mr. Merdle didn't want him, and was put out of countenance when the great creature looked at him; but inappeasable Society would have him—and had got him.

Mr. Merdle himself was usually late on these occasions, as a man still detained in the clutch of giant enterprises when other men had shaken off their dwarfs for the day. On this occasion, he was the last arrival. Treasury said Merdle's work punished him a little. Bishop said he was glad to think that this wealth flowed into the coffers of a gentleman who accepted it with meekness.

Mr. Merdle sat silent, and looked at the table-cloth. Sometimes a magnate addressed him, to turn the stream of his own particular discussion towards him; but Mr. Merdle seldom gave much attention to it, or did more than rouse himself from his calculations and pass the wine.

When they rose, so many of the magnates had something to say to Mr. Merdle individually, that he held little levees by the sideboard, and checked them off as they went out at the door.

Treasury hoped he might venture to congratulate one of England's world-famed capitalists and merchant-princes (he had turned that original sentiment in the house a few times, and it came easy to him) on a new achievement. To extend the triumphs of such men, was to extend the triumphs and resources of the nation; and Treasury felt—he gave Mr. Merdle to understand—patriotic on the subject.

"Thank you, my lord," said Mr. Merdle; "thank you. I accept your congratulations with pride, and I am glad you approve."

Bishop then betook himself up-stairs, and the other magnates gradually floated up after him until there was no one left below but Mr. Merdle. That gentleman, after looking

at the table-cloth until the soul of the chief butler glowed with a noble resentment, went slowly up after the rest, and became of no account in the stream of people on the grand staircase. Mrs. Merdle was at home, the best of the jewels were hung out to be seen, Society got what it came for, Mr. Merdle drank twopennyworth of tea in a corner and got more than he wanted.'

III

OH! WONDERFUL MERDLE!!

'In Mrs. Merdle's absence abroad, Mr. Merdle still kept the great house open, for the passage through it of a stream of visitors. A few of these took affable possession of the establishment. Three or four ladies of distinction and liveliness used to say to one another, "Let us dine at our dear Merdle's next Thursday. Whom shall we have?" Our dear Merdle would then receive his instructions; and would sit heavily among the company at table and wander lumpishly about his drawing-room afterwards, only remarkable for appearing to have nothing to do with the entertainment beyond being in its way.

Mr. Merdle, evasively rolling his eyes round the Chief Butler's shoes without raising them to the index of that stupendous creature's thoughts, had signified to him his intention of giving a special dinner: not a very large dinner, but a very special dinner. The Chief Butler had signified, in return, that he had no objection to look on at the most expensive thing in that way that could be done: and the day of the dinner was now come.

Mr. Merdle stood in one of his drawing-rooms, with his back to the fire, waiting for the arrival of his important guests. He seldom or never took the liberty of standing with his back to the fire, unless he was quite alone. In the presence of the Chief Butler, he could not have done such a deed. He would have clasped himself by the wrists in that constabulary manner of his, and have paced up and down the hearthrug, or gone creeping about among the rich objects of furniture, if his oppressive retainer had appeared in the room at that very moment. The sly shadows which seemed to dart out of hiding when the fire rose, and to dart back into it when the fire fell, were sufficient witnesses

of his making himself so easy. They were even more than sufficient, if his uncomfortable glances at them might be taken to mean anything.

Mr. Merdle's right hand was filled with the evening paper, and the evening paper was full of Mr. Merdle. His wonderful enterprise, his wonderful wealth, his wonderful Bank, were the fattening food of the evening paper that night. The wonderful Bank, of which he was the chief projector, establisher, and manager, was the latest of the many Merdle wonders. So modest was Mr. Merdle withal, in the midst of these splendid achievements, that he looked far more like a man in possession of his house under a dis-traint, than a commercial Colossus bestriding his own hearthrug, while the little ships were sailing in to dinner.

Behold the vessels coming into port! The engaging young Barnacle was the first arrival; but Bar overtook him on the staircase. Bar, strengthened as usual with his double eye-glass and his little jury droop, was overjoyed to see the engaging young Barnacle; and opined that we were going to sit *in Banco*, as we lawyers called it, to take a special argument?'

It was a dinner to provoke an appetite, though he had not had one. The rarest dishes, sumptuously cooked and sumptuously served; the choicest fruits; the most exquisite wines; marvels of workmanship in gold and silver, china and glass; innumerable things delicious to the senses of taste, smell, and sight, were insinuated into its composition. O, what a wonderful man this Merdle, what a great man, what a master man, how blessedly and enviably endowed—in a word, what a rich man!

IV

MRS. MERDLER'S COMPLAINT

Mrs. Merdle also had a complaint, a complaint of a far different nature from that of her husband. Her complaint was that Mr. Merdle did not accommodate himself to Society.

'Mr. Merdle, so twisting his hands into what hair he had upon his head that he seemed to lift himself up by it as he started out of his chair, cried:

"Why, in the name of all the infernal powers, Mrs. Merdle, who does more for Society than I do? Do you see these premises, Mrs. Merdle? Do you see this furniture, Mrs. Merdle? Do you look in the glass and see yourself, Mrs. Merdle? Do you know the cost of all this, and who it's all provided for? And yet will you tell me that I oughtn't to go into Society? I, who shower money upon it in this way? I, who might be almost said—to—to—to harness myself to a watering-cart full of money, and go about, saturating Society, every day of my life?"

"Pray, don't be violent, Mr. Merdle," said Mrs. Merdle.

"Violent?" said Mr. Merdle. "You are enough to make me desperate. You don't know half of what I do to accommodate Society. You don't know anything of the sacrifices I make for it."

"I know," returned Mrs. Merdle, "that you receive the best in the land. I know that you move in the whole Society of the country. And I believe I know (indeed, not to make any ridiculous pretence about it, I know I know) who sustains you in it, Mr. Merdle."

"Mrs. Merdle," retorted that gentleman, wiping his dull red and yellow face, "I know that, as well as you do. If you were not an ornament to Society, and if I was not a benefactor to Society, you and I would never have come together. When I say a benefactor to it, I mean a person who provides it with all sorts of expensive things to eat and drink and look at. But, to tell me that I am not fit for it after all I have done for it—after all I have done for it," repeated Mr. Merdle, with a wild emphasis that made his wife lift up her eyelids, "after all—all!—to tell me I have no right to mix with it after all, is a pretty reward."

"I say," answered Mrs. Merdle composedly, "that you ought to make yourself fit for it by being more *dégagé*, and less pre-occupied. There is a positive vulgarity in carrying your business affairs about with you as you do."

Mr. Merdle's step-son, Sparkler, who later married Little Dorrit's sister, Fanny, confirmed this view of his mother.

"Fellers referring to my Governor—expression not my own—occasionally compliment my Governor in a very handsome way on being immensely rich and knowing—

perfect phenomenon of Buyer and Banker and that—but say the Shop sits heavily on him. Say he carries the Shop about, on his back rather—like Jew clothesmen with too much business.”

“Which,” said Mrs. Merdle, rising, with her floating drapery about her, “is exactly my complaint. Edmund, give me your arm up-stairs.”

What joy Mr. Merdle ever got out of life is not recorded; his misdeeds were evidently their own reward.

‘Mr. Merdle, left alone to meditate on a better conformation of himself to Society, looked out of nine windows in succession, and appeared to see nine wastes of space. When he had thus entertained himself he went down-stairs, and looked intently at all the carpets on the ground floor; and then came up-stairs again, and looked intently at all the carpets on the first-floor; as if they were gloomy depths, in unison with his oppressed soul.’

V

THE SPREADING FAME

‘The famous name of Merdle became, every day, more famous in the land. Nobody knew that the Merdle of such high renown had ever done any good to any one, alive or dead, or to any earthly thing; nobody knew that he had any capacity or utterance of any sort in him, which had ever thrown, for any creature, the feeblest farthing-candle ray of light on any path of duty or diversion, pain or pleasure, toil or rest, fact or fancy, among the multiplicity of paths in the labyrinth trodden by the sons of Adam; nobody had the smallest reason for supposing the clay of which this object of worship was made to be other than the commonest clay, with as clogged a wick smouldering inside of it as ever kept an image of humanity from tumbling to pieces.

All people knew (or thought they knew) that he had made himself immensely rich; and, for that reason alone, prostrated themselves before him, more degradedly and less excusably than the darkest savage creeps out of his hole in the ground to propitiate, in some log or reptile, the Deity of his benighted soul.

Nay, the high priests of this worship had the man before them as a protest against their meanness. The multitude worshipped on trust—though always distinctly knowing why—but the officiators at the altar had the man habitually in their view. They sat at his feasts, and he sat at theirs. There was a spectre always attendant on him, saying to these high priests, “Are such the signs you trust, and love to honour; this head, these eyes, this mode of speech, the tone and manner of this man? You are the levers of the Circumlocution Office, and the rulers of men. When half-a-dozen of you fall out by the ears, it seems that mother earth can give birth to no other rulers. Does your qualification lie in the superior knowledge of men, which accepts, courts, and puffs this man? Or, if you are competent to judge aright the signs I never fail to show you when he appears among you, is your superior honesty your qualification?” Two rather ugly questions these, always going about town with Mr. Merdle; and there was a tacit agreement that they must be stifled.’

And greater still grew the name of Mr. Merdle. It was on the lips of rich and poor alike, the name symbolic of wealth and success. To speculate with Mr. Merdle was not alone the ambition of the adventurous. Even the sagacious Mr. Panks, clerk to that old humbug, the patriarchal Casby, was bitten; “I’ve gone into it. I’ve made the calculations. I’ve worked it. They’re safe and genuine.” And he, poor man though he was, backed it with his little legacy of one thousand pounds. “A man of immense resources—enormous capital—Government influence. They’re the best schemes afloat. They’re safe. They’re certain.”

“Go in and win,” he urged Arthur Clennam. To lose was unthinkable. “I have looked into it. Name up, everywhere—immense resources—enormous capital—great position—high connection—Government influence.”

Such was the value received in exchange for the dinners at the Merdle establishment in Harley Street. Such was the return made for Mrs. Merdle’s services to Society.

VI

MR. MERDLE'S FRIEND

Mr. Dorrit, lately returned from a visit to Switzerland and Italy after many years spent in a debtor's prison, from which a vast fortune brought him release, was honoured with a visit from "the great and wonderful Merdle".

'Commotion in the office of the hotel. Merdle! The landlord turned out to show him up-stairs. The clerks and servants cut him off by back-passages, and were found accidentally hovering in doorways and angles, that they might look upon him. Merdle! O ye sun, moon, and stars, the great man! The rich man, who had in a manner revised the New Testament, and already entered into the kingdom of Heaven. The man who could have any one he chose to dine with him, and who had made the money! As he went up the stairs, people were already posted on the lower stairs, that his shadow might fall upon them when he came down.'

It was with much hesitancy that Mr. Dorrit broached the subject of obtaining the great man's advice in respect to "the laying out" of his money.

"You know we may almost say we are related, sir," said Mr. Merdle, curiously interested in the pattern of the carpet, "and, therefore, you may consider me at your service."

"Ha. Very handsome, indeed!" cried Mr. Dorrit. "Ha. Most handsome!"

"It would not," said Mr. Merdle, "be at the present moment easy for what I may call a mere outsider to come into any of the good things—of course I speak of my own good things——"

"Of course, of course!" cried Mr. Dorrit, in a tone implying that there were no other good things.

"—Unless at a high price. At what we are accustomed to term a very long figure."

Mr. Dorrit laughed in the buoyancy of his spirit. Ha, ha, ha! Long figure. Good. Ha! Very expressive to be sure!

"However," said Mr. Merdle, "I do generally retain in my own hands the power of exercising some preference—people in general would be pleased to call it favour—as a sort of compliment for my care and trouble." . . .

"You are very good," replied Mr. Dorrit. "You are *very* good."

"Of course," said Mr. Merdle, "there must be the strictest integrity and uprightness in these transactions; there must be the purest faith between man and man; there must be unimpeached and unimpeachable confidence; or business could not be carried on."

Mr. Dorrit hailed these generous sentiments with fervour.

"Therefore," said Mr. Merdle, "I can only give you a preference to a certain extent."

"I perceive. To a defined extent," observed Mr. Dorrit.

"Defined extent. And perfectly above-board. As to my advice, however," said Mr. Merdle, "that is another matter . . . there is nothing in the bonds of spotless honour between myself and my fellow-man to prevent my parting with, if I choose. And that," said Mr. Merdle, now deeply intent upon a dust-cart that was passing the windows, "shall be at your command whenever you think proper."

New acknowledgments from Mr. Dorrit. New passages of Mr. Merdle's hand over his forehead. Calm and silence. Contemplation of Mr. Dorrit's waistcoat buttons by Mr. Merdle.

"My time being rather precious," said Mr. Merdle, suddenly getting up, as if he had been waiting in the interval for his legs, and they had just come, "I must be moving towards the City. Can I take you anywhere, sir? I shall be happy to set you down, or send you on. My carriage is at your disposal." . . .

Then, leaning on Mr. Merdle's arm, did Mr. Dorrit descend the staircase, seeing the worshippers on the steps, and feeling that the light of Mr. Merdle shone by reflection in himself. Then, the carriage and the ride into the City; and the people who looked at them; and the hats that flew off grey heads; and the general bowing and crouching before this wonderful mortal, the like of which prostration of spirit was not to be seen—no, by high Heaven, no!
"A wonderful man to be Mr. Merdle's friend!"

VII

THE CHOICE OF A PEN-KNIFE

'That illustrious man, and great national ornament, Mr. Merdle, continued his shining course. It began to be widely understood that one who had done society the admirable service of making so much money out of it, could not be suffered to remain a commoner. A baronetcy was spoken of with confidence; a peerage was frequently mentioned. Rumour had it that Mr. Merdle had set his golden face against a baronetcy; that he had plainly intimated to Lord Decimus that a baronetcy was not enough for him; that he had said, "No: a Peerage, or plain Merdle."'

While this talk was at its height, Mr. Merdle paid a shy sort of visit to his daughter-in-law, at the end of which he asked for the loan of a pen-knife to be returned to-morrow.

'It was an odd thing, Fanny smilingly observed, for her who could seldom prevail upon herself even to write a letter, to lend to a man of such vast business as Mr. Merdle.

A pearl pen-knife was forthcoming from a trinket box.

"Thank you," said Mr. Merdle; "but if you have got one with a darker handle, I think I should prefer one with a darker handle."

"Tortoise-shell?"

"Thank you," said Mr. Merdle; "yes. I think I should prefer tortoise-shell." And a tortoise-shell one took the place of the one of pearl.

"I will forgive you, if you ink it."

"I'll undertake not to ink it," said Mr. Merdle.'

That evening Physician was hurriedly called up by an attendant at some baths not far away.

'There was a bath in that corner, from which the water had been hastily drained off. Lying in it, as in a grave or sarcophagus, with a hurried drapery of sheet and blanket thrown across it, was the body of a heavily-made man, with an obtuse head, and coarse, mean, common features. A sky-light had been opened to release the steam with which

the room had been filled; but, it hung, condensed into water-drops, heavily upon the walls, and heavily upon the face and figure in the bath. The room was still hot, and the marble of the bath still warm; but, the face and figure were clammy to the touch. The white marble at the bottom of the bath was veined with a dreadful red. On the ledge at the side, were an empty laudanum-bottle and a tortoise-shell handled pen-knife—soiled, but not with ink.

“Separation of jugular vein—death rapid—been dead at least half an hour.”

“Mrs. Merdle’s maid must be called, and told to get Mrs. Merdle up, and prepare her as gently as she can, to see me. I have dreadful news to break to her.”

Thus, Physician to the Chief Butler. The latter, who had a candle in his hand, called his man to take it away. Then he approached the window with dignity; looking on at Physician’s news exactly as he had looked on at the dinners in that very room.

“Mr. Merdle is dead.”

“I should wish,” said the Chief Butler, “to give a month’s notice.”

“Mr. Merdle has destroyed himself.”

“Sir,” said the Chief Butler, “that is very unpleasant to the feelings of one in my position, as calculated to awaken prejudice; and I should wish to leave immediately.”

“If you are not shocked, are you not surprised?” demanded the Physician, warmly.

The Chief Butler, erect and calm, replied in these memorable words. “Sir, Mr. Merdle never was the gentleman, and no ungentlemanly act on Mr. Merdle’s part would surprise me. Is there anybody else I can send to you, or any other directions I can give before I leave, respecting what you would wish to be done?”

VIII

THE AFTERMATH

‘Appalling whispers began to circulate, east, west, north, and south. At first, they were faint, and went no further than a doubt whether Mr. Merdle’s wealth would be found to be as vast as had been supposed; whether there might not be a temporary difficulty in “realising” it; whether

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there might not even be a temporary suspension (say a month or so) on the part of the wonderful Bank. As the whispers became louder, which they did from that time every minute, they became more threatening. He had sprung from nothing, by no natural growth or process that any one could account for; he had been, after all, a low, ignorant fellow; he had been a down-looking man, and no one had ever been able to catch his eye; he had been taken up by all sorts of people, in quite an unaccountable manner; he had never had any money of his own, his ventures had been utterly reckless, and his expenditure had been most enormous. In steady progression, as the day declined, the talk rose in sound and purpose. He had left a letter at the Baths addressed to his physician, and his physician had got the letter, and the letter would be produced at the Inquest on the morrow, and it would fall like a thunder-bolt upon the multitude he had deluded. Numbers of men in every profession and trade would be blighted by his insolvency; old people who had been in easy circumstances all their lives would have no place of repentance for their trust in him but the workhouse; legions of women and children would have their whole future desolated by the hand of this mighty scoundrel. Every partaker of his magnificent feasts would be seen to have been a sharer in the plunder of innumerable homes; every servile worshipper of riches who had helped to set him on his pedestal, would have done better to worship the Devil point-blank. So the talk, lashed louder and higher by confirmation on confirmation, and by edition after edition of the evening papers, swelled into such a roar when night came as might have brought one to believe that a solitary watcher on the gallery above the Dome of St. Paul's would have perceived the night air to be laden with a heavy muttering of the name of Merdle, coupled with every form of execration.'

* * * * *

The Epilogue is spoken by Ferdinand Barnacle, to Arthur Clennam;

“One cannot help admiring the fellow. Must have been such a master of humbug. Knew people so well—got over them so completely—did so much with them!”

In his easy way, he was really moved to genuine admiration,

“I hope,” said Arthur, “that he and his dupes may be a warning to people not to have so much done with them again.”

“My dear Mr. Clennam,” returned Ferdinand, laughing, “have you really such a verdant hope? The next man who has as large a capacity and as genuine a taste for swindling, will succeed as well. Pardon me, but I think you really have no idea how the human bees will swarm to the beating of any old tin kettle; in that fact lies the complete manual of governing them. When they can be got to believe that the kettle is made of the precious metals, in that fact lies the whole power of men like our late lamented. No doubt there are here and there,” said Ferdinand politely, “exceptional cases, where people have been taken in for what appeared to them to be much better reasons; and I need not go far to find such a case; but they don’t invalidate the rule. Good day! I hope that when I have the pleasure of seeing you next, this passing cloud will have given place to sunshine. Don’t come a step beyond the door. I know the way out perfectly. Good day!”

* * * * *

Such is the story of ‘the shining wonder, the new constellation to be followed by the wise men bringing gifts, until it stopped over certain carrion at the bottom of a bath and disappeared . . . the greatest Forger and the greatest Thief that ever cheated the gallows.’



CHAPTER TWO

A GLORIOUS PARTNERSHIP

I

MONTAGUE TIGG

MONTAGUE TIGG was the embodiment of all the attributes that are necessary for the making of the ideal sponger, or tapster; probably the greatest in that line in the varied collection that Dickens has presented to us. Here is his description:

‘The gentleman was of that order of appearance, which is currently termed shabby-genteel, though in respect of his dress he can hardly be said to have been in any extremities, as his fingers were a long way out of his gloves, and the soles of his feet were at an inconvenient distance from the upper leather of his boots. His nether garments were of a bluish gray—violent in its colours once, but sobered now by age and dilginess—and were so stretched and strained in a tough conflict between his braces and his straps that they appeared every moment in danger of flying asunder at the knees. His coat, in colour blue and of a military cut, was

buttoned and frogged, up to his chin. His cravat was, in hue and pattern, like one of those mantles which hair-dressers are accustomed to wrap about their clients, during the progress of the professional mysteries. His hat had arrived at such a pass that it would have been hard to determine whether it was originally white or black. But he wore a moustache—a shaggy moustache too: nothing in the meek and merciful way, but quite in the fierce and scornful style: the regular Satanic sort of thing—and he wore, besides, a vast quantity of unbrushed hair. He was very dirty and very jaunty; very bold and very mean; very swaggering and very slinking; very much like a man who might have been something better, and unspeakably like a man who deserved to be something worse.'

That he was a sort of half-brother to Jingle is at once apparent; but the likeness ends at that, as the characters are totally dissimilar. It is an excellent example of the manner in which Dickens was able to create two characters so alike and yet so distinct.

The particular business of Montague Tigg on our first introduction was acting as the mouthpiece of his partner, Chevy Slyme, who was waiting "round the corner".

Tigg was always loquacious in his eulogy of his friend, the distant relative of the Chuzzlewit family, which had gathered at the Blue Dragon at "little Wiltshire Village within an easy journey of the fair old town of Salisbury" at the bidding of old Martin. The astonished Mr. Pecksniff came in contact with him in the act of obscuring the ray of light which usually proceeded from the keyhole of Martin's room; whereupon Tigg produced from the inside of his hat "the cover of an old letter, begrimed with dirt and redolent of tobacco, addressed to Chevy Slyme, Esquire". It was natural that at such a moment Mr. Pecksniff should be more than ordinarily mistrustful: the man before him was undoubtedly a typical adventurer. He therefore expressed his righteous indignation in the true Pecksniffian manner. "It is very distressing to me, to be compelled to say that you are not the person you claim to be. I know Mr. Slyme, my friend: this will not do: honesty is the best policy: you had better not; you had indeed;" to which Tigg replied:

"I understand your mistake, and I am not offended. Why? Because it's complimentary. You suppose I would

set myself up for Chevy Slyme. Sir, if there is a man on earth whom a gentleman would feel proud and honoured to be mistaken for, that man in my friend Slyme. For he is, without an exception, the highest-minded, the most independent-spirited, most original, spiritual, classical, talented, the most thoroughly Shakespearian, if not Miltonic, and at the same time the most disgustingly-unappreciated dog I know. But, sir, I have not the vanity to attempt to pass for Slyme. Any other man in the wide world, I am equal to; but Slyme is, I frankly confess, a great many cuts above me. Therefore you are wrong."

"I judged from this," said Mr. Pecksniff, holding out the cover of the letter.

"No doubt you did," returned the gentleman. "But, Mr. Pecksniff, the whole thing resolves itself into an instance of the peculiarities of genius. Every man of true genius has his peculiarity. Sir, the peculiarity of my friend Slyme is, that he is always waiting round the corner. He is perpetually round the corner, sir. He is round the corner at this instant. Now," said the gentleman, shaking his forefinger before his nose, and planting his legs wider apart as he looked attentively in Mr. Pecksniff's face, "that is a remarkably curious and interesting trait in Mr. Slyme's character; and whenever Slyme's life comes to be written, that trait must be thoroughly worked out by his biographer, or society will not be satisfied. Observe me, society will not be satisfied!"

Mr. Pecksniff coughed.

"Slyme's biographer, sir, whoever he may be," resumed the gentleman, "must apply to me; or, if I am gone to that what's-his-name from which no thingumbob comes back, he must apply to my executors for leave to search among my papers. I have taken a few notes in my poor way, of some of that man's proceedings—my adopted brother, sir,—which would amaze you. He made use of an expression, sir, only on the fifteenth of last month when he couldn't meet a little bill and the other party wouldn't renew, which would have done honour to Napoleon Bonaparte in addressing the French army."

"And pray," asked Mr. Pecksniff, obviously not quite at his ease, "what may be Mr. Slyme's business here, if I may be permitted to inquire, who am compelled by a regard for my own character to disavow all interest in his proceedings?"

“In the first place,” returned the gentleman, “you will permit me to say that I object to that remark, and that I strongly and indignantly protest against it on behalf of my friend Slyme. In the next place, you will give me leave to introduce myself. My name, sir, is Tigg. The name of Montague Tigg will perhaps be familiar to you, in connection with the most remarkable events of the Peninsular War?”

Mr. Pecksniff gently shook his head.

“No matter,” said the gentleman. “That man was my father, and I bear his name. I am consequently proud—proud as Lucifer. Excuse me one moment. I desire my friend Slyme to be present at the remainder of this conference.”

II

ENTER CHEVY SLYME

Chevy Slyme was shorter in stature than Tigg and appeared wearing “an old blue camlet cloak with a lining of faded scarlet. His sharp features being much pinched and nipped by long waiting in the cold, and his straggling red whiskers and frowzy hair being more than usually dishevelled from the same cause: he certainly looked rather unwholesome and uncomfortable.”

Having brought the two relatives face to face, Tigg proceeded:

“Now I’ll tell you what it is. I’m a most confoundedly soft-hearted kind of fellow in my way, and I cannot stand by, and see you two blades cutting each other’s throats when there’s nothing to be got by it. Mr. Pecksniff, you’re the cousin of the testator up-stairs and we’re the nephew—I say we, meaning Chiv. Perhaps in all essential points, you are more nearly related to him than we are. Very good. If so, so be it. But you can’t get at him, neither can we. I give you my brightest word of honour, sir, that I’ve been looking through that key-hole, with short intervals of rest, ever since nine o’clock this morning, in expectation of receiving an answer to one of the most moderate and gentlemanly applications for a little temporary assistance—only fifteen pounds, and *my* security. Now, I say decisively . . . that it won’t do. The whole family is pouring down into this place . . . union must be made

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against the common enemy. . . . Think of it. Don't commit yourself now. You'll find us at the Half Moon and Seven Stars in this village at any time, and open to any reasonable proposition."

And having thus endeavoured to ingratiate himself with Mr. Pecksniff, he bade his friend Chiv "go out and see what sort of night it is" and then proceeded to try to tap Mr. Pecksniff to the extent of "two half-crowns".

"Mr. Slyme lost no time in disappearing, and, it is to be presumed, in going round the corner. Mr. Tigg, planting his legs as wide apart as he could be reasonably expected by the most sanguine man to keep them, shook his head at Mr. Pecksniff and smiled.

"We must not be too hard," he said, "upon the little eccentricities of our friend Slyme. You saw him whisper me?"

Mr. Pecksniff had seen him.

"You heard my answer, I think?"

Mr. Pecksniff had heard it.

"Five shillings, eh?" said Mr. Tigg, thoughtfully. "Ah! what an extraordinary fellow! Very moderate too!"

Mr. Pecksniff made no answer.

"Five shillings!" pursued Mr. Tigg, musing: "and to be punctually repaid next week; that's the best of it. You heard that?"

Mr. Pecksniff had not heard that.

"No! You surprise me!" cried Tigg. "That's the cream of the thing, sir. I never knew that man fail to redeem a promise in my life. You're not in want of change, are you?"

"No," said Mr. Pecksniff, "thank you. Not at all."

"Just so," returned Mr. Tigg. "If you had been, I'd have got it for you." With that he began to whistle; but a dozen seconds had not elapsed when he stopped short, and, looking earnestly at Mr. Pecksniff, said:

"Perhaps you'd rather not lend Slyme five shillings?"

"I would much rather not," Mr. Pecksniff rejoined.

"Egad!" cried Tigg, gravely nodding his head as if some ground of objection occurred to him at that moment for the first time, "it's very possible you may be right. Would you entertain the same sort of objection to lending *me* five shillings, now?"

"Yes, I couldn't do it, indeed," said Mr. Pecksniff.

“Not even half-a-crown, perhaps?” urged Mr. Tigg.

“Not even half-a-crown.”

“Why then we come,” said Mr. Tigg, “to the ridiculously small amount of eighteenpence. Ha! ha!”

“And that,” said Mr. Pecksniff, “would be equally objectionable.”

On receipt of this assurance, Mr. Tigg shook him heartily by both hands, protesting with much earnestness, that he was one of the most consistent and remarkable men he had ever met, and that he desired the honour of his better acquaintance. He moreover observed that there were many little characteristics about his friend Slyme, of which he could by no means, as a man of strict honour, approve; but that he was prepared to forgive him all these slight drawbacks, and much more, in consideration of the great pleasure he himself had that day enjoyed in his social intercourse with Mr. Pecksniff, which had given him a far higher and more enduring delight than the successful negotiation of any small loan on the part of his friend could possibly have imparted. With which remarks he would beg leave, he said, to wish Mr. Pecksniff a very good evening. And so he took himself off: as little abashed by his recent failure as any gentleman would desire to be.

III

MORE OF THE TAPSTER'S GENTLE ART

The meeting of the Chuzzlewit family to consider the action of old Martin ended in disorder, for the bird had flown. It is not recorded what other overtures were made by Tigg to the other members of the family on behalf of Chevy Slyme, for three, two or even one, half-crowns, but later, Tigg waited on young Martin and Tom Pinch at Mr. Pecksniff's house, in the custody of Mark Tapley, the ostler at the Blue Dragon.

‘They were not a little startled by the unexpected obtrusion into that sanctuary of genius of a human head, which, although a shaggy and somewhat alarming head, in appearance, smiled affably upon them from the doorway, in a manner that was at once waggish, conciliatory, and expressive of approbation.

"I am not industrious myself, gents both," said the head, "but I know how to appreciate that quality in others. I wish I may turn gray and ugly, if it isn't, in my opinion, next to genius, one of the very charmingest qualities of the human mind. Upon my soul, I am grateful to my friend Pecksniff for helping me to the contemplation of such a delicious picture as you present. You remind me of Whittington, afterwards thrice Lord Mayor of London. I give you my unsullied word of honour, that you very strongly remind me of that historical character. You are a pair of Whittingtons, gents, without the cat; which is a most agreeable and blessed exception to me, for I am not attached to the feline species. My name is Tigg; how do you do?"

Martin looked to Mr. Pinch for an explanation; and Tom, who had never in his life set eyes on Mr. Tigg before, looked to that gentleman himself.

"Chevy Slyme?" said Mr. Tigg, interrogatively, and kissing his left hand in token of friendship. "You will understand me when I say that I am the accredited agent of Chevy Slyme; that I am the ambassador from the court of Chiv? Ha ha!"

"Heyday!" asked Martin, starting at the mention of a name he knew. "Pray, what does he want with me?"

"If your name is Pinch," Mr. Tigg began.

"It is not," said Martin, checking himself. "That is Mr. Pinch."

"If that is Mr. Pinch," cried Tigg, kissing his hand again, and beginning to follow his head into the room, "he will permit me to say that I greatly esteem and respect his character, which has been most highly commended to me by my friend Pecksniff; and that I deeply appreciate his talent for the organ, notwithstanding that I do not, if I may use the expression, grind myself. If that is Mr. Pinch, I will venture to express a hope that I see him well, and that he is suffering no inconvenience from the easterly wind?"

"Thank you," said Tom. "I am very well."

"That is a comfort," Mr. Tigg rejoined. "Then," he added, shielding his lips with the palm of his hand, and applying them close to Mr. Pinch's ear, "I have come for the letter."

"For the letter," said Tom, aloud. "What letter?"

"The letter," whispered Tigg in the same cautious manner as before, "which my friend Pecksniff addressed to Chevy Slyme, Esquire, and left with you."

"He didn't leave any letter with me," said Tom.

"Hush!" cried the other. "It's all the same thing, though not so delicately done by my friend Pecksniff as I could have wished. The money."

"The money!" cried Tom, quite scared.

"Exactly so," said Mr. Tigg. With which he rapped Tom twice or thrice upon the breast and nodded several times, as though he would say that he saw they understood each other; that it was unnecessary to mention the circumstance before a third person; and that he would take it as a particular favour if Tom would slip the amount into his hand, as quietly as possible.

Mr. Pinch, however, was so very much astounded by this (to him) inexplicable deportment, that he at once openly declared there must be some mistake, and that he had been entrusted with no commission whatever having any reference to Mr. Tigg or to his friend either. Mr. Tigg received this declaration with a grave request that Mr. Pinch would have the goodness to make it again; and on Tom's repeating it in a still more emphatic and unmistakable manner, checked it off, sentence for sentence, by nodding his head solemnly at the end of each. When it had come to a close for a second time, Mr. Tigg sat himself down in a chair and addressed the young men as follows:

"Then I tell you what it is, gents both. There is at this present moment, in this very place, a perfect constellation of talent and genius, who is involved, through what I cannot but designate as the culpable negligence of my friend Pecksniff, in a situation as tremendous, perhaps, as the social intercourse of the nineteenth century will readily admit of. There is actually at this instant, at the Blue Dragon in this village, an ale-house observe; a common, paltry, low-minded, clodhopping, pipe-smoking ale-house; an individual, of whom it may be said, in the language of the Poet, that nobody but himself can in any way come up to him; who is detained there for his bill. Ha! ha! For his bill. I repeat it. For his bill. Now," said Mr. Tigg, "we have heard of Fox's Book of Martyrs, I believe, and we have heard of the Court of Requests, and the Star Chamber; but I fear the contradiction of no man alive or dead, when I assert that my friend Chevy Slyme, being held

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in pawn for a bill, beats any amount of cock-fighting with which I am acquainted."

Martin and Mr. Pinch looked, first at each other, and afterwards at Mr. Tigg, who with his arms folded on his breast surveyed them, half in despondency and half in bitterness.

"Don't mistake me, gents both," he said, stretching forth his right hand. "If it had been for anything but a bill, I could have borne it, and could still have looked upon mankind with some feeling of respect: but when such a man as my friend Slyme is detained for a score—a thing in itself essentially mean; a low performance on a slate, or possibly chalked upon the back of a door—I do feel that there is a screw of such magnitude loose somewhere, that the whole framework of society is shaken, and the very first principles of things can no longer be trusted. In short, gents both," said Mr. Tigg with a passionate flourish of his hands and head, "when a man like Slyme is detained for such a thing as a bill, I reject the superstitions of ages, and believe nothing. I don't even believe that I *don't* believe, curse me if I do!"

"I am very sorry, I am sure," said Tom, after a pause, "but Mr. Pecksniff said nothing to me about it, and I couldn't act without his instructions. Wouldn't it be better, sir, if you were to go to—to wherever you came from—yourself, and remit the money to your friend?"

"How can that be done, when I am detained also!" said Mr. Tigg; "and when, moreover, owing to the astounding, and I must add, guilty negligence of my friend Pecksniff, I have no money for coach-hire?"

Tom thought of reminding the gentleman (who, no doubt, in his agitation had forgotten it) that there was a post-office in the land; and that possibly if he wrote to some friend or agent for a remittance it might not be lost upon the road; or at all events that the chance, however desperate, was worth trusting to.

The whole sum involved was only three pounds, and this sum Martin borrowed from Tom Pinch, desiring him to inform the landlady of the Blue Dragon that he would pay the bill.

Mr. Pinch complying, at once imparted the intelligence to Mr. Tigg, who shook him warmly by the hand in return,

assuring him that his faith in anything and everything was again restored. . . .

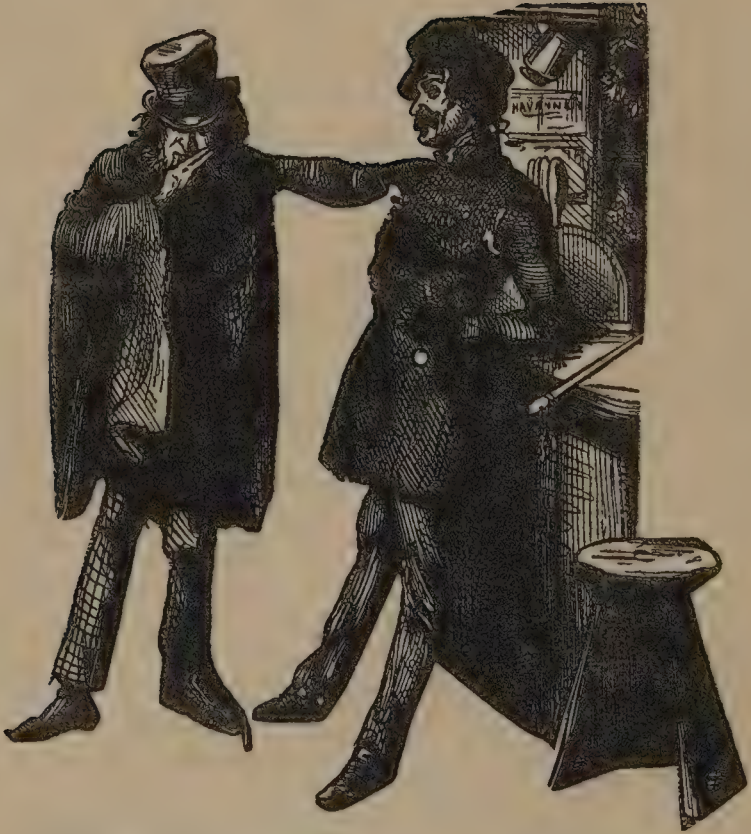
The rosy hostess scarcely needed Mr. Pinch's word as a preliminary to the release of her two visitors, of whom she was glad to be rid on any terms. . . .

The business in hand thus easily settled, Mr. Pinch and Martin would have withdrawn immediately, but for the urgent entreaties of Mr. Tigg that they would allow him the honour of presenting them to his friend Slyme, which were so very difficult of resistance that, yielding partly to these persuasions and partly to their own curiosity, they suffered themselves to be ushered into the presence of that distinguished gentleman.

He was brooding over the remains of yesterday's decanter of brandy, and was engaged in the thoughtful occupation of making a chain of rings on the top of the table with the wet foot of his drinking-glass. Wretched and forlorn as he looked, Mr. Slyme had once been, in his way, the choicest of swaggerers: putting forth his pretensions, boldly, as a man of infinite taste and most undoubted promise. The stock-in-trade requisite to set up an amateur in this department of business is very slight, and easily got together; a trick of the nose and a curl of the lip sufficient to compound a tolerable sneer, being ample provision for any exigency. But, in an evil hour, this off-shoot of the Chuzzlewit trunk, being lazy, and ill qualified for any regular pursuit, and having dissipated such means as he ever possessed, had formally established himself as a professor of Taste for a livelihood; and finding, too late, that something more than his old amount of qualifications was necessary to sustain him in this calling, had quickly fallen to his present level, where he retained nothing of his old self but his boastfulness and his bile, and seemed to have no existence separate or apart from his friend Tigg. And now so abject and so pitiful was he—at once so maudlin, insolent, beggarly, and proud—that even his friend and parasite, standing erect beside him, swelled into a Man by contrast.

“Chiv,” said Mr. Tigg, clapping him on the back, “my friend Pecksniff not being at home, I have arranged our trifling piece of business with Mr. Pinch and friend. Mr. Pinch and friend, Mr. Chevy Slyme! Chiv, Mr. Pinch and friend!”

“These are agreeable circumstances in which to be introduced to strangers,” said Chevy Slyme, turning his bloodshot



"Chiv," said Mr. Tigg, "I have arranged our trifling piece of business with Mr. Pinch."

eyes towards Tom Pinch. "I am the most miserable man in the world, I believe!"

Tom begged he wouldn't mention it; and finding him in this condition, retired, after an awkward pause, followed by Martin. But Mr. Tigg so urgently conjured them, by coughs and signs, to remain in the shadow of the door, that they stopped there.

"I swear," cried Mr. Slyme, giving the table an imbecile blow with his fist. . . . "that I am the wretchedest creature on record. Society is in a conspiracy against me. I'm the most literary man alive. I'm full of scholarship; I'm full of genius; I'm full of information; I'm full of novel views on every subject; yet look at my condition! I'm at this moment obliged to two strangers for a tavern bill!"

Mr. Tigg replenished his friend's glass, pressed it into his hand, and nodded an intimation to the visitors that they would see him in a better aspect immediately.

"Obliged to two strangers for a tavern bill, eh!" repeated Mr. Slyme after a sulky application to his glass. "Very pretty! And crowds of impostors, the while becoming famous; men who are no more on a level with me than—Tigg, I take you to witness that I am the most persecuted hound on the face of the earth."

With a whine, not unlike the cry of the animal he named, in its lowest state of humiliation, he raised his glass to his mouth again. He found some encouragement in it; for when he set it down he laughed scornfully. Upon that Mr. Tigg gesticulated to the visitors once more, and with great expression: implying that now the time was come when they would see Chiv in his greatness.

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Mr. Slyme. "Obliged to two strangers for a tavern bill! Yet I think I've a rich uncle, Tigg, who could buy up the uncles of fifty strangers! Have I, or have I not? I come of a good family, I believe! Do I, or do I not? I'm not a man of common capacity or accomplishments, I think! Am I, or am I not?"

"You are the American aloe of the human race, my dear Chiv," said Mr. Tigg, "which only blooms once in a hundred years!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Slyme again. "Obliged to two strangers for a tavern bill! I! Obliged to two architect's apprentices. Fellows who measure earth with iron chains, and build houses like bricklayers. Give me the names of those two apprentices. How dare they oblige me!"

Mr. Tigg was quite lost in admiration of this noble trait in his friend's character; as he made known to Mr. Pinch in a neat little ballet of action, spontaneously invented for the purpose.

"I'll let 'em know, and I'll let all men know," cried Chevy Slyme, "that I'm none of the mean, grovelling, tame characters they meet with commonly. I have an independent spirit. I have a heart that swells in my bosom. I have a soul that rises superior to base considerations."

"Oh, Chiv, Chiv," murmured Mr. Tigg, "you have a nobly independent nature, Chiv!"

"You go and do your duty, sir," said Mr. Slyme, angrily, "and borrow money for travelling expenses; and whoever you borrow it of, let 'em know that I possess a haughty spirit, and a proud spirit, and have infernally finely-touched chords in my nature, which won't brook patronage. Do you hear? Tell 'em I hate 'em, and that that's the way I preserve my self-respect; and tell 'em that no man ever respected himself more than I do!"

Tigg could not resist the opportunity of tapping the gentle Tom Pinch for a modest sum, and little thought he would meet with such success; and the following scene ensued:

"You are not going, Mr. Pinch?" said Tigg.

"Thank you," answered Tom. "Yes. Don't come down."

"Do you know that I should like one little word in private with you, Mr. Pinch?" said Tigg, following him. "One minute of your company in the skittle-ground would very much relieve my mind. Might I beseech that favour?"

"Oh, certainly," replied Tom, "if you really wish it." So he accompanied Mr. Tigg to the retreat in question: on arriving at which place that gentleman took from his hat what seemed to be the fossil remains of an antediluvian pocket-handkerchief, and wiped his eyes therewith.

"You have not beheld me this day," said Mr. Tigg, "in a favourable light."

"Don't mention that," said Tom, "I beg."

"But you have *not*," cried Tigg. "I must persist in that opinion. If you could have seen me, Mr. Pinch, at the head of my regiment on the coast of Africa, charging in the form of a hollow square, with the women and children and the regimental plate-chest in the centre, you would

not have known me for the same man. You would have respected me, sir."

Tom had certain ideas of his own upon the subject of glory; and consequently he was not quite so much excited by this picture as Mr. Tigg could have desired.

"But no matter!" said that gentleman. "The school-boy writing home to his parents and describing the milk-and-water, said 'This is indeed weakness.' I repeat that assertion in reference to myself at the present moment: and I ask your pardon. Sir, you have seen my friend Slyme?"

"No doubt," said Mr. Pinch.

"Sir, you have been impressed by my friend Slyme?"

"Not very pleasantly, I must say," answered Tom, after a little hesitation.

"I am grieved but not surprised," cried Mr. Tigg, detaining him with both hands, "to hear that you have come to that conclusion; for it is my own. But, Mr. Pinch, though I am a rough and thoughtless man, I can honour Mind. I honour Mind in following my friend. To you of all men, Mr. Pinch, I have a right to make appeal on Mind's behalf, when it has not the art to push its fortune in the world. And so, sir—not for myself, who have no claim upon you, but for my crushed, my sensitive and independent friend, who has—I ask the loan of three half-crowns. I ask you for the loan of three half-crowns, distinctly, and without a blush. I ask it, almost as a right. And when I add that they will be returned by post, this week, I feel that you will blame me for that sordid stipulation."

Mr. Pinch took from his pocket an old-fashioned red-leather purse with a steel clasp, which had probably once belonged to his deceased grandmother. It held one half-sovereign and no more. All Tom's worldly wealth until next quarter-day.

"Stay!" cried Mr. Tigg, who had watched this proceeding keenly. "I was just about to say, that for the convenience of posting you had better make it gold. Thank you. A general direction, I suppose, to Mr. Pinch, at Mr. Pecksniff's, will find you?"

"That'll find me," said Tom. "You had better put Esquire to Mr. Pecksniff's name, if you please. Direct to me, you know, at Seth Pecksniff's, Esquire."

"At Seth Pecksniff's, Esquire," repeated Mr. Tigg, taking an exact note of it with a stump of pencil. "We said this week, I believe?"

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“Yes: or Monday will do,” observed Tom.

“No, no, I beg your pardon. Monday will *not* do,” said Mr. Tigg. “If we stipulated for this week, Saturday is the latest day. Did we stipulate for this week?”

“Since you are so particular about it,” said Tom, “I think we did.”

Mr. Tigg added this condition to his memorandum; read the entry over to himself with a severe frown; and that the transaction might be the more correct and business-like, appended his initials to the whole. That done, he assured Mr. Pinch that everything was now perfectly regular; and, after squeezing his hand with great fervour, departed.

IV

EXIT CHEVY

At this juncture Chevy Slyme goes out of the story, not to appear again until the end, when he assisted, as a police officer (of all occupations!) at the final exposure and arrest of Jonas Chuzzlewit, for the murder of his late associate Montague Tigg.

““Steady, kinsman!” said the chief officer of the party. “Don’t be violent.”

“Whom do you call kinsman?” asked old Martin sternly.

“You,” said the man, “among others.”

Martin turned his scrutinising gaze upon him. He was sitting lazily across a chair with his arms resting on the back; eating nuts, and throwing the shells out of window as he cracked them; which he still continued to do while speaking.

“Ay,” he said, with a sulky nod. “You may deny your nephews till you die, but Chevy Slyme is Chevy Slyme still, all the world over. Perhaps even you may feel it some disgrace to your own blood to be employed in this way. I’m to be bought off.”

There was no doubt a fairly complete reformation about Chevy Slyme; but he had no misgivings over his old associate Tigg.

“‘I have always expected that he and I would be brought together again in the course of business,’” said Slyme, taking

a fresh handful of nuts from his pocket; "but I thought he would be wanted for some swindling job: it never entered my head that I should hold a warrant for the apprehension of his murderer."

When the disclosure of the detective Nadgett was over, and the party, save for the guilty man and the police officer, had departed, Jonas made overtures to his relative for "one hundred pounds for only five minutes in the next room" for the purpose of taking poison, Chevy Slyme succumbed; "it would be more—more creditable to the family" he observed with trembling lips; and with a faltering request that he would "engage to say a—Prayer, now, or something of that sort" roughly and silently refused by Jonas—gave him his wish. But five minutes was not long enough for the craven Jonas: by the time the other police officers were returned he greeted the amazed Slyme with "I've not had time. I've not been able to do it, I—five minutes more—two minutes more—Only one". But Slyme gave him no reply and "thrusting the purse upon him and forcing it back into his pocket, called up his men".

And although Jonas cheated the gallows by taking the poison in the coach on the way to the police station, Chevy Slyme redeemed his character through him.

V

TIGG SOLUS

The glorious partnership, as I must always regard it, came to an end, as all such partnerships must, and do. Old Martin Chuzzlewit used Tigg for his own purposes in unmasking the fawning servility of his relatives, and Chevy Slyme and Montague Tigg quarrelled over it.

When young Martin returned from America, and was reduced to such straits as to necessitate pawning his watch, he met Tigg, who was on a similar mission, at "the house of a mutual relation" in the region of the Strand.

Tigg lost no time in improving his acquaintance, and endeavoured to render Martin some services, but knowing Tigg's propensities for cadging half-crowns for his friend

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Slyme, Martin politely declined his overtures at which Tigg was indignant, reminding him that it was

‘the duty of a man to be just before he is generous. Be just now, and you can be generous presently. Do not confuse me with the man Slyme. Do not distinguish the man Slyme as a friend of mine, for he is no such thing. I have been compelled, sir, to abandon the party whom you call Slyme. I have no knowledge of the party whom you call Slyme. I am, sir,’ said Mr. Tigg, striking himself upon the breast, ‘a premium tulip, of a very different growth and cultivation from the cabbage Slyme, sir.’

‘It matters very little to me,’ said Martin coolly, ‘whether you have set up as a vagabond on your own account, or are still trading on behalf of Mr. Slyme. I wish to hold no correspondence with you. In the devil’s name, man,’ said Martin, scarcely able despite his vexation to repress a smile, as Mr. Tigg stood leaning his back against the shutters of a shop window, adjusting his hair with great composure, ‘will you go one way or other?’

Tigg, having been unsuccessful in getting David, the pawnbroker’s assistant, to advance him an extra sixpence on his shirt, could not resist the opportunity of tapping Martin for a “nimble half-crown”.

‘‘You will allow me to remind you, sir,’’ said Mr. Tigg, with sudden dignity, ‘that you—not I—that you—I say emphatically, *you*—have reduced the proceedings of this evening to a cold and distant matter of business, when I was disposed to place them on a friendly footing. It being made a matter of business, sir, I beg to say that I expect a trifle (which I shall bestow in charity) as commission upon the pecuniary advance, in which I have rendered you my humble services. After the terms in which you have addressed me, sir,’’ concluded Mr. Tigg, ‘‘you will not insult me, if you please, by offering more than half-a-crown.’’

Martin drew that piece of money from his pocket, and tossed it towards him. Mr. Tigg caught it, looked at it to assure himself of its goodness, spun it in the air after the manner of a pieman, and buttoned it up. Finally, he raised his hat an inch or two from his head, with a military air, and, after pausing a moment with deep gravity, as to decide

in which direction he should go, and to what Earl or Marquis among his friends he should give the preference in his next call, stuck his hands in his skirt-pockets and swaggered round the corner.'

It may be fairly well assumed that the visit to the pawnbrokers for a loan of a paltry couple of shillings on his shirt and his renunciation of his old confederate Chevy Slyme was the ebb of Montague Tigg's fortune, for we next meet him in palatial offices in Pall Mall, and what a change had come over the once shabby-genteel tapster.

'He had a world of jet-black shining hair upon his head, upon his cheeks, upon his chin, upon his upper lip. His clothes, symmetrically made, were of the newest fashion and the costliest kind. Flowers of gold and blue, and green and blushing red, were on his waistcoat; precious chains and jewels sparkled on his breast; his fingers, clogged with brilliant rings, were as unwieldy as summer flies but newly rescued from a honey-pot. The daylight mantled in his gleaming hat and boots as in a polished glass. And yet, though changed his name, and changed his outward surface, it was Tigg. Though turned and twisted upside down, and inside out, as great men have been sometimes known to be; though no longer Montague Tigg, but Tigg Montague; still it was Tigg; the same Satanic, gallant, military Tigg. The brass was burnished, lacquered, newly-stamped; yet it was the true Tigg metal notwithstanding.'

Instead of the slinking, besotted, always round the corner Chevy Slyme of old days, he had for confederate the self same David who was last met behind the pawnbroker's counter. 'This gentleman's name, by the way, had been originally Crimp; but as the word was susceptible of an awkward construction and might be misrepresented, he had altered it to Crimple.' And this Crimple was Secretary, and Tigg the Chairman of this brand new company.

"It was a capital thought, wasn't it?"

"What was a capital thought, David?" Mr. Montague inquired.

"The Anglo-Bengalee," tittered the secretary.

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"The Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company, is rather a capital concern, I hope, David," said Montague.

"Capital indeed!" cried the secretary, with another laugh—"in one sense."

"In the only important one," observed the chairman; "which is number one, David."

"What," asked the secretary, bursting into another laugh, "what will be the paid up capital, according to the next prospectus?"

"A figure of two, and as many oughts after it as the printer can get into the same line," replied his friend. "Ha, ha!"

"What a chap you are!" exclaimed David admiringly, when this little alarm had subsided.

"Say, genius, David, genius."

"Well, upon my soul, you *are* a genius then," said David. "I always knew you had the gift of the gab, of course; but I never believed you were half the man you are. How could I?"

"I rise with circumstances, David. That's a point of genius in itself," said Tigg. "If you were to lose a hundred pound wager to me at this minute, David, and were to pay it (which is most confoundedly improbable), I should rise, in a mental point of view, directly."

"The property in Bengal" was described by Tigg Montague—to his satellite David—as "Devilish fine property . . . the preserves of tigers alone is worth a mint of money", at which the couple laughed uproariously, it having been David's idea that if the few pounds he had saved, together with the few pounds that Tigg had come into—how, we are not informed—could be put together, they "could furnish an office and make a show". To which Tigg had added "that provided we did it on a sufficiently large scale we could furnish an office and make a show, without any money at all."

And so the gigantic swindle came into being. Dickens could have written a whole book about it and kept us interested and amused, all the time: but his fertile brain preferred to treat it merely as an incident. It grew, however, and became the great financial house of Merdle in the later novel of *Little Dorrit*. But the humour vested in Tigg is unfortunately absent in Merdle.

How Jonas Chuzzlewit, partly by his own cupidity, and partly owing to the threats of exposure held over him by Montague Tigg, joined in the swindle, and was induced to get his relative, Mr. Pecksniff, to venture too, is duly related in its proper place in this volume. (See page 160.) With this latter object in view they both made the journey to Salisbury to see Mr. Pecksniff, during which Jonas made more than one attempt to murder Tigg. Leaving Tigg at Salisbury with Mr. Pecksniff, Jonas returned to London, but quickly doubled back to Salisbury, while supposed at home, asleep and not to be disturbed, worn out after his long journey. Waylaying Tigg on his parting from Pecksniff, Jonas brutally murdered him in a wood, hardly a fitting end even for a blackguard such as Montague Tigg whose whimsical trickeries have endeared him to our hearts.



CHAPTER THREE

THE VILLAIN OF THE PIECE

I

THE VENDETTA

OLIVER TWIST's half brother slinks cloaked and phantom-like through the sordid story connected with Fagin, Bumble and the workhouse, and the first description of him is given to Mr. Brownlow and Rose Maylie by Nancy, when she discloses to them what she knew of the dastardly plot: how she overheard the bargain between Fagin and a man called Monks; that for a certain sum of money Oliver Twist was to be made a thief, "which this Monks wanted for some purpose of his own", and how at a later interview she heard Monks say:

"So the only proofs of the boy's identity lie at the bottom of the river, and the old hag that received them from the mother is rotting in her coffin." . . .

"Then, he said, with oaths common enough in my ears, but strange to yours, that if he could gratify his hatred by taking the boy's life without bringing his own neck in danger,

he would; but, as he couldn't, he'd be upon the watch to meet him at every turn in life; and if he took advantage of his birth and history, he might harm him yet. 'In short, Fagin,' he says, 'Jew as you are, you never laid such snares as I'll contrive for my young brother, Oliver.' "

"His brother!" exclaimed Rose.

"Those were his words," said Nancy, glancing uneasily round. . . . "And more. When he spoke of you and the other lady, and said it seemed contrived by Heaven, or the devil, against him, that Oliver should come into your hands, he laughed, and said there was some comfort in that too, for how many thousands and hundreds of thousands of pounds would you not give, if you had them, to know who your two-legged spaniel was." "

Asked for a description of the man, Nancy informed Mr. Brownlow:

"He is tall, and a strongly made man, but not stout; he has a lurking walk; and as he walks, constantly looks over his shoulder, first on one side, and then on the other. His face is dark, like his hair and eyes; and, although he can't be more than six or eight and twenty, withered and haggard. His lips are often discoloured and disfigured with the marks of teeth; for he has desperate fits, and sometimes even bites his hands and covers them with wounds. Upon his throat: so high that you can see a part of it below his neckerchief when he turns his face: there is a broad red mark, like a burn or scald."

It was this mark that gave Mr. Brownlow a clue to the identity of Monks, and led to his arrest and the complete disclosure of the detestable plot against Oliver Twist.

II

OLIVER TWIST'S PARENTAGE

The father of Oliver Twist, when a mere boy of under twenty, by "family pride and the most sordid and narrowest of all ambitions", was forced into a wretched marriage with a woman ten years his senior, and of that marriage Edward Leeford was, in the words of Mr. Brownlow, "the sole and

most unnatural issue". "I know the misery, the slow torture, the protracted anguish of that ill assorted union." After ten years they were separated, and the "mother, wholly given up to continental frivolities, had utterly forgotten the young husband ten good years her junior, who, with prospects blighted, lingered on at home, he fell among new friends"—a naval officer and two daughters—"one a beautiful creature of nineteen, and the other a mere child of two or three years old. . . .

Acquaintance, intimacy, friendship, fast followed on each other. . . . The end of a year found him solemnly contracted, to that daughter."

Business calling the father to Rome, he died there without a will, and naturally all his money went to his wife and son.

Before he went to Rome, Mr. Brownlow explains—

"He came to me, and left with me, among some other things, a picture—a portrait painted by himself—a likeness of this poor girl—which he did not wish to leave behind, and could not carry forward on his hasty journey. He was worn by anxiety and remorse almost to a shadow; confided to me his intention to convert his whole property, at any loss, into money, and, having settled on his wife and you a portion of his recent acquisition, to fly the country—I guessed too well he would not fly alone—and never see it more. Even from me, his old and early friend . . . he withheld any more particular confession, promising to write and tell me all, and after that to see me once again, for the last time on earth. Alas! *That* was the last time. I had no letter, and I never saw him more. . . .

"I went, when all was over, to the scene of his . . . guilty love, resolved that if my fears were realised that erring child should find one heart and home to shelter and compassionate her. The family had left that part a week before; they had called in such trifling debts as were outstanding, discharged them, and left the place by night. Why, or whither, none can tell."

Monks drew his breath yet more freely, and looked round with a smile of triumph.

"When your brother," said Mr. Brownlow, drawing nearer to the other's chair, "When your brother: a feeble, ragged, neglected child: was cast in my way by a stronger

hand than chance, and rescued by me from a life of vice and infamy——”

“What?” cried Monks.

“By me,” said Mr. Brownlow. “I told you I should interest you before long. I say by me—I see that your cunning associate suppressed my name, although for aught he knew, it would be quite strange to your ears. When he was rescued by me, then, and lay recovering from sickness in my house, his strong resemblance to this picture I have spoken of, struck me with astonishment. Even when I first saw him in all his dirt and misery, there was a lingering expression in his face that came upon me like a glimpse of some old friend flashing on one in a vivid dream. I need not tell you he was snared away before I knew his history . . . I lost the boy and no efforts of mine could recover him. Your mother being dead I knew that you alone could solve the mystery. . . . Your agents had no clue to your residence. . . . I wearied them with new applications. I paced the streets by night and day, but until two hours ago, all my efforts were fruitless, and I never saw you for an instant.”

“And now you do see me,” said Monks, rising boldly, “what then? Fraud and robbery are high-sounding words—justified, you think, by a fancied resemblance in some young imp to an idle daub of a dead man’s. Brother! You don’t even know that a child was born of this maudlin pair; you don’t even know that.”

“I *did not*,” replied Mr. Brownlow, rising too; “but within the last fortnight I have learnt it all. You have a brother; you know it, and him. There was a will, which your mother destroyed, leaving the secret and the gain to you at her own death. It contained a reference to some child likely to be the result of this sad connection, which child was born, and accidentally encountered by you, when your suspicions were first awakened by his resemblance to his father. You repaired to the place of his birth. There existed proofs—proofs long suppressed—of his birth and parentage. Those proofs were destroyed by you, and now, in your own words to your accomplice the Jew, ‘*the only proofs of the boy’s identity lie at the bottom of the river, and the old hag that received them from the mother is rotting in her coffin.*’ Unworthy son, coward, liar,—you, who hold your councils with thieves and murderers in dark rooms at night,—you, whose plots and wiles have brought a violent

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death upon the head of one worth millions such as you,—you, who from your cradle were gall and bitterness to your own father's heart, and in whom all evil passions, vice, and profligacy, festered, till they found a vent in a hideous disease which has made your face an index even to your mind—you, Edward Leeford, do you still brave me?"

"No, no, no!" returned the coward, overwhelmed by these accumulated charges.

"Every word!" cried the old gentleman, "every word that has passed between you and this detested villain, is known to me. Shadows on the wall have caught your whispers, and brought them to my ear; the sight of the persecuted child has turned vice itself, and given it the courage and almost the attributes of virtue. Murder has been done, to which you were morally if not really a party."

III

MONKS'S CONFESSION

"This child," said Mr. Brownlow, drawing Oliver to him and laying his hand upon his head, "is your half brother; the illegitimate son of your father, my dear friend Edward Leeford, by poor young Agnes Fleming, who died in giving him birth. . . . He was born in this town."

"In the workhouse of this town," was the sullen reply. "You have the story there." He pointed impatiently to the papers as he spoke.

"I must have it here, too," said Mr. Brownlow, looking round upon the listeners.

"Listen then! You!" returned Monks. "His father being taken ill at Rome, was joined by his wife, my mother, from whom he had been long separated, who went from Paris and took me with her—to look after his property, for what I know, for she had no great affection for him, nor he for her. He knew nothing of us, for his senses were gone, and he slumbered on till next day, when he died. Among the papers in his desk, were two, dated on the night his illness first came on, directed to yourself;" he addressed himself to Mr. Brownlow; "and enclosed in a few short lines to you, with an intimation on the cover of the package that it was not to be forwarded till after he was dead. One

of these papers was a letter to this girl Agnes; the other a will."

"What of the letter?" asked Mr. Brownlow.

"The letter?—A sheet of paper crossed and crossed again with a penitent confession, and prayers to God to help her. He had palmed a tale on the girl that some secret mystery—to be explained one day—prevented his marrying her just then; and so she had gone on, trusting patiently to him, until she trusted too far, and lost what none could ever give her back. She was, at that time, within a few months of her confinement. He told her all he had meant to do, to hide her shame, if he had lived, and prayed her, if he died, not to curse his memory, or think the consequences of their sin would be visited on her or their young child; for all the guilt was his. He reminded her of the day he had given her the little locket and the ring with her christian name engraved upon it, and a blank left for that which he hoped one day to have bestowed upon her—prayed her yet to keep it, and wear it next her heart, as she had done before—and then ran on, wildly, in the same words, over and over again, as if he had gone distracted. I believe he had."

"The will," said Mr. Brownlow, as Oliver's tears fell fast. Monks was silent.

"The will," said Mr. Brownlow, speaking for him, "was in the same spirit as the letter. He talked of miseries which his wife had brought upon him; of the rebellious disposition, vice, malice, and premature bad passions of you his only son, who had been trained to hate him; and left you, and your mother, each an annuity of eight hundred pounds. The bulk of his property he divided into two equal portions—one for Agnes Fleming, and the other for their child, if it should be born alive, and ever come of age. If it were a girl, it was to inherit the money unconditionally; but if a boy, only on the stipulation that in his minority he should never have stained his name with any public act of dishonour, meanness, cowardice, or wrong. He did this, he said, to mark his confidence in the mother, and his conviction—only strengthened by approaching death—that the child would share her gentle heart, and noble nature. If he were disappointed in this expectation, then the money was to come to you: for then, and not till then, when both children were equal, would he recognise your prior claim upon his purse, who had none upon his

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heart, but had, from an infant, repulsed him with coldness and aversion."

"My mother," said Monks, in a louder tone, "did what a woman should have done. She burnt this will. The letter never reached its destination; but that, and other proofs, she kept, in case they ever tried to lie away the blot. The girl's father had the truth from her with every aggravation that her violent hate—I love her for it now—could add. Goaded by shame and dishonour he fled with his children into a remote corner of Wales, changing his very name that his friends might never know of his retreat; and here, no great while afterwards, he was found dead in his bed. The girl had left her home, in secret, some weeks before; he had searched for her, on foot, in every town and village near; it was on the night when he returned home, assured that she had destroyed herself, to hide her shame and his, that his old heart broke."

There was a short silence here, until Mr. Brownlow took up the thread of the narrative.

"Years after this," he said, "this man's—Edward Lee-ford's—mother came to me. He had left her, when only eighteen; robbed her of jewels and money; gambled, squandered, forged, and fled to London: where for two years he had associated with the lowest outcasts. She was sinking under a painful and incurable disease, and wished to recover him before she died. Inquiries were set on foot, and strict searches made. They were unavailing for a long time, but ultimately successful; and he went back with her to France."

"There she died," said Monks, "after a lingering illness; and, on her death-bed, she bequeathed these secrets to me, together with her unquenchable and deadly hatred of all whom they involved—though she need not have left me that, for I had inherited it long before. She would not believe that the girl had destroyed herself, and the child too, but was filled with the impression that a male child had been born, and was alive. I swore to her, if ever it crossed my path, to hunt it down; never to let it rest; to pursue it with the bitterest and most unrelenting animosity; to vent upon it the hatred that I deeply felt, and to spit upon the empty vaunt of that insulting will by dragging it, if I could, to the very gallows-foot. She was right. He came in my way at last. I began well; and, but for babbling drabs, I would have finished as I began!"

As the villain folded his arms tight together, and muttered curses on himself in the impotence of baffled malice, Mr. Brownlow turned to the terrified group beside him, and explained that the Jew, who had been his old accomplice and confidant, had a large reward for keeping Oliver ensnared: of which some part was to be given up, in the event of his being rescued: and that a dispute on this head had led to their visit to the country house for the purpose of identifying him.

"The locket and the ring?" said Mr. Brownlow, turning to Monks.

"I bought them from the man and woman I told you of, who stole them from the nurse, who stole them from the corpse," answered Monks without raising his eyes. "You know what became of them."

IV

ENTER MR. AND MRS. BUMBLE

At a sign from Mr. Brownlow, Mr. and Mrs. Bumble are now introduced to the scene. The name of Bumble has become so firmly established as the synonym of all that is bad in local administration, that one often loses sight of the fact that both he and his precious wife (formerly Mrs. Corney) are the full blooded rogues they really were.

Being well versed in villainy, they both deny any knowledge of Monks, or having had any dealings with him.

"I never saw him in all my life," said Mr. Bumble.

"Nor sold him anything, perhaps?"

"No," replied Mrs. Bumble.

"You never had, perhaps, a certain gold locket and ring?" said Mr. Brownlow.

"Certainly not," replied the matron. "Why are we brought here to answer to such nonsense as this?"

Then were led in two palsied women, who shook and tottered as they walked.

"You shut the door the night old Sally died," said the foremost one, raising her shrivelled hand, "but you couldn't shut out the sound, nor stop the chinks."

"No, no," said the other, looking round her and wagging her toothless jaws. "No, no, no,"

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"We heard her try to tell you what she'd done, and saw you take a paper from her hand, and watched you too, next day, to the pawnbroker's shop," said the first.

"Yes," added the second, "and it was a 'locket and gold ring.' We found out that, and saw it given you. We were by. Oh! we were by."

"And we know more than that," resumed the first, "for she told us often, long ago, that the young mother had told her that, feeling she should never get over it, she was on her way, at the time that she was taken ill, to die near the grave of the father of the child."

"If he," replied the woman—she pointed to Monks—"has been coward enough to confess, as I see he has, and you have sounded all these hags till you have found the right ones, I have nothing more to say. I *did* sell them, and they're where you'll never get them. What then?"

"Nothing," replied Mr. Brownlow, "except that it remains for us to take care that neither of you is employed in a situation of trust again. You may leave the room."

"I hope," said Mr. Bumble, looking about him with great ruefulness, as Mr. Grimwig disappeared with the two old women: "I hope that this unfortunate little circumstance will not deprive me of my parochial office?"

"Indeed it will," replied Mr. Brownlow. "You may make up your mind to that, and think yourself well off besides."

"It was all Mrs. Bumble. She *would* do it," urged Mr. Bumble; first looking round to ascertain that his partner had left the room.

"That is no excuse," replied Mr. Brownlow. "You were present on the occasion of the destruction of these trinkets, and indeed are the more guilty of the two, in the eye of the law; for the law supposes that your wife acts under your direction."

"If the law supposes that," said Mr. Bumble, squeezing his hat emphatically in both hands, "the law is a ass—a idiot. If that's the eye of the law, the law is a bachelor; and the worst I wish the law is, that his eye may be opened by experience—by experience."

Laying great stress on the repetition of these two words, Mr. Bumble fixed his hat on very tight, and putting his hands in his pockets, followed his helpmate down stairs.

"Young lady," said Mr. Brownlow, turning to Rose, "give me your hand. Do not tremble. You need not fear to hear the few remaining words we have to say."

"If they have—I do not know how they can, but if they have—any reference to me," said Rose, "pray let me hear them at some other time. I have not strength or spirits now."

"Nay," returned the old gentleman, drawing her arm through his; "you have more fortitude than this, I am sure. Do you know this young lady, sir?"

"Yes," replied Monks.

"I never saw you before," said Rose faintly.

"I have seen you often," returned Monks.

"The father of the unhappy Agnes had *two* daughters," said Mr. Brownlow. "What was the fate of the other—the child?"

"The child," replied Monks, "when her father died in a strange place, in a strange name, without a letter, book, or scrap of paper that yielded the faintest clue by which his friends or relatives could be traced—the child was taken by some wretched cottagers, who reared it as their own."

"Go on," said Mr. Brownlow, signing to Mrs. Maylie to approach. "Go on!"

"You couldn't find the spot to which these people had repaired," said Monks, "but where friendship fails, hatred will often force a way. My mother found it, after a year of cunning search—ay, and found the child."

"She took it, did she?"

"No. The people were poor and began to sicken—at least the man did—of their fine humanity; so she left it with them, giving them a small present of money which would not last long, and promised more, which she never meant to send. She didn't quite rely, however, on their discontent and poverty for the child's unhappiness, but told the history of the sister's shame, with such alterations as suited her; bade them take good heed of the child, for she came of bad blood; and told them she was illegitimate, and sure to go wrong at one time or other. The circumstances countenanced all this; the people believed it; and there the child dragged on an existence, miserable enough even to satisfy us, until a widow lady, residing, then, at Chester, saw the girl by chance, pitied her, and took her home. There was some cursed spell, I think, against us; for in spite of all our efforts she remained there and was happy. I lost sight of her, two or three years ago, and saw her no more until a few months back."

"Do you see her now?"

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“Yes. Leaning on your arm.”

“But not the less my niece,” cried Mrs. Maylie, folding the fainting girl in her arms; “not the less my dearest child. I would not lose her now, for all the treasures of the world. My sweet companion, my own dear girl!”

“The only friend I ever had,” cried Rose, clinging to her. “The kindest, best of friends. My heart will burst. I cannot bear all this.”

“You have borne more, and have been, through all, the best and gentlest creature that ever shed happiness on every one she knew,” said Mrs. Maylie, embracing her tenderly. “Come, come, my love, remember who this is who waits to clasp you in his arms, poor child! See here—look, look, my dear!”

“Not aunt,” cried Oliver, throwing his arms about her neck; “I’ll never call her aunt—sister, my own dear sister, that something taught my heart to love so dearly from the first! Rose, dear, darling Rose!”

Let the tears which fell, and the broken words which were exchanged in the long close embrace between the orphans, be sacred. A father, sister, and mother, were gained, and lost, in that one moment. Joy and grief were mingled in the cup; but there were no bitter tears: for even grief itself arose so softened, and clothed in such sweet and tender recollections, that it became a solemn pleasure, and lost all character of pain.’

V

THE HAPPY ENDING

And so, like all Dickens’s stories, everything ended happily, and we read in conclusion:

‘It appeared, on full and careful investigation, that if the wreck of property remaining in the custody of Monks (which had never prospered either in his hands or in those of his mother) were equally divided between himself and Oliver, it would yield, to each, little more than three thousand pounds. By the provisions of his father’s will, Oliver would have been entitled to the whole; but Mr. Brownlow, unwilling to deprive the elder son of the opportunity of retrieving his former vices and pursuing an honest career,

proposed this mode of distribution, to which his young charge joyfully acceded.

Monks, still bearing that assumed name, retired with his portion to a distant part of the New World; where, having quickly squandered it, he once more fell into his old courses, and, after undergoing a long confinement for some fresh act of fraud and knavery, at length sunk under an attack of his old disorder, and died in prison.'

The character of Monks may travel on conventional lines: it savours much of the theatre, but we must not condemn either the character or the story as they are both true to type and more than ever in those early days was Dickens permeated (not to say obsessed) with a love and a desire for the Stage: and of all the stage figures he drew, none was truer to the type beloved of the dramatist of the day, than that of Monks, the villain of the piece.



“Keep still you little devil, or I’ll cut your throat!”

CHAPTER FOUR

“A MERE WARMINT”

I

THE CONVICT

THE case of Abel Magwitch, the convict in *Great Expectations*, is a typical example of the great humanity that underlies the characters of Dickens; it is a clear exposition of the understanding of the connection between ignorance and crime that the author more than once expressed in his work, but never more successfully than in this instance.

Our first introduction to Magwitch is in the bleak churchyard, overgrown with nettles in “the marsh country, down by the river, within, as the river wound, twenty miles of the sea.”

Pip, the young brother-in-law of Joe Gargery, the blacksmith, is examining the inscription on his mother’s tombstone when he is surprised by the terrible voice of a man saying “Keep still you little devil, or I’ll cut your throat!”

‘A fearful man, all in coarse grey, with a great iron on his leg. A man with no hat, and with broken shoes, and with an old rag tied round his head. A man who had been soaked in water, and smothered in mud, and lamed by stones, and cut by flints, and stung by nettles, and torn by briars; who limped, and shivered, and glared and growled; and whose teeth chattered in his head as he seized me by the chin.’

Finding out that his sister was married to a blacksmith, the man frightens Pip into promising to bring him food and a file.

““You bring me, to-morrow morning early, that file and them wittles. You bring the lot to me, at that old Battery

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over yonder. You do it, and you never dare to say a word or dare to make a sign concerning your having seen such a person as me, or any person sumever, and you shall be let to live. You fail, or you go from my words in any partickler, no matter how small it is, and your heart and your liver shall be tore out, roasted and ate. Now, I ain't alone, as you may think I am.”’

With much trepidation, Pip steals an assortment of food and some brandy from his sister's store cupboard and takes it—and a file—out on the marshes for the escaped convict, as he now learns him to be—and returns home. That afternoon the soldiers call at the Forge with the news that two convicts have escaped from the Hulks in the river, and Pip and his brother-in-law join them in the search, and ultimately come up with the two men who are fighting together in a ditch.

II

THE CAPTURE

““Here are both men!” panted the sergeant, struggling at the bottom of a ditch. “Surrender, you two! and confound you for two wild beasts! Come asunder!”

Water was splashing, and mud was flying, and oaths were being sworn, and blows were being struck, when some more men went down into the ditch to help the sergeant, and dragged out, separately, my convict and the other one. Both were bleeding and panting and execrating and struggling; but of course I knew them both directly.

“Mind!” said my convict, wiping blood from his face with his ragged sleeves, and shaking torn hair from his fingers; “I took him! I give him up to you! Mind that!”

“It's not much to be particular about,” said the sergeant; “it'll do you small good, my man, being in the same plight yourself. Handcuffs there!”

“I don't expect it to do me any good. I don't want it to do me more good than it does now,” said my convict, with a greedy laugh. “I took him. He knows it. That's enough for me.”

The other convict was livid to look at, and, in addition to the old bruised left side of his face, seemed to be bruised

and torn all over. He could not so much as get his breath to speak, until they were both separately handcuffed, but leaned upon a soldier to keep himself from falling.

"Take notice, guard—he tried to murder me," were his first words.

"Tried to murder him?" said my convict, disdainfully. "Try, and not do it? I took him, and giv' him up; that's what I done. I not only prevented him getting off the marshes, but I dragged him here—dragged him this far on his way back. He's a gentleman, if you please, this villain. Now, the Hulks has got its gentleman again, through me. Murder him? Worth my while, too, to murder him, when I could do worse and drag him back!"

The other one still gasped, "He tried—he tried—to—murder me. Bear—bear witness."

"Lookee here!" said my convict to the sergeant. "Single-handed I got clear of the prison-ship; I made a dash and I done it. I could ha' got clear of these death-cold flats likewise—look at my leg: you won't find much iron on it—if I hadn't made discovery that *he* was here. Let *him* go free? Let *him* profit by the means as I found out? Let *him* make a tool of me afresh and again? Once more? No, no, no. If I had died at the bottom there;" and he made an emphatic swing at the ditch with his manacled hands; "I'd have held to him with that grip, that you should have been safe to find him in my hold."

The other fugitive, who was evidently in extreme horror of his companion, repeated, "He tried to murder me. I should have been a dead man if you had not come up."

"He lies!" said my convict, with fierce energy. "He's a liar born, and he'll die a liar. Look at his face; ain't it written there? Let him turn those eyes of his on me. I defy him to do it."

The other, with an effort at a scornful smile—which could not, however, collect the nervous working of his mouth into any set expression, looked at the soldiers, and looked about at the marshes and at the sky, but certainly did not look at the speaker.

"Do you see him?" pursued my convict. "Do you see what a villain he is? Do you see those grovelling and wandering eyes? That's how he looked when we were tried together. He never looked at me."

The other, always working and working his dry lips and turning his eyes restlessly about him far and near, did

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at last turn them for a moment on the speaker, with the words, "You are not much to look at," and with a half-taunting glance at the bound hands. At that point, my convict became so frantically exasperated, that he would have rushed upon him but for the interposition of the soldiers. "Didn't I tell you," said the other convict then, "that he would murder me, if he could?" And any one could see that he shook with fear, and that there broke out upon his lips curious white flakes, like thin snow.

"Enough of this parley," said the sergeant. "Light those torches."

"March!"

III

AFTER MANY DAYS

Many years go by: Pip never breathed a word of the assistance he gave to the escaped convict; one day a stranger at the village ale-house, after hearing he is the blacksmith's boy of the name of Pip, exhibits a file and gives him two bright shillings wrapped up in a piece of paper which on discovery later turns out to be two one pound notes. Still Pip keeps silent as to his adventure.

In the meantime an eccentric old lady, Miss Havisham, takes a fancy to Pip and pays for his apprenticeship to Joe, and later, her lawyer visits him and tells him he is a young man of great expectations and is to go up to London to be educated as a gentleman, but on no account is he to seek for any news regarding the source of his wealth: that is the principal stipulation of his good fortune.

All indications point to Miss Havisham as his benefactress, and this she does not in any way deny, using all means to keep him in close touch with her adopted daughter Estella—a proud heartless girl, with whom he very soon falls in love.

And so in a sort of a fool's Paradise lives Mr. Pip (as he is now styled) until the age of twenty-three, when one stormy night a visitor comes to his chambers in the Temple.

It was a stormy night: the rain was pelting piteously down: the howling wind had blown out the lights on the staircase, and Pip—hearing a footstep on the stairs—took out his reading lamp to see who was there. The man said he wanted "Mr. Pip"!

"That is my name—there's nothing the matter?"

"Nothing the matter," returned the voice. And the man came on with outstretched hands, to the amazement of Pip, who received him but coldly.

"It's disappointing to a man," said the man, in a coarse broken voice, "arter having looked for'ard so distant, and come so fur; but you're not to blame for that—neither on us is to blame for that. I'll speak in half a minute. Give me half a minute, please."

He sat down on a chair that stood before the fire, and covered his forehead with his large brown veinous hands.'

Then did Pip recognise in his visitor the convict on the marshes, years and years ago. "I knew him . . . no need to take a file from his pocket and show it to me. . . . I could not have known my convict more distinctly than I knew him now, as he sat in the chair before the fire." . . . But he did not yet realise the fact that it was to this returned convict that he owed his present good fortune.

IV

MAKING A GENTLEMAN

"Yes, Pip, dear boy, I've made a gentleman on you! It's me wot has done it! I swore that time, sure as ever I earned a guinea, that guinea should go to you. I swore arterwards, sure as ever I spec'lated and got rich, you should get rich. I lived rough, that you should live smooth; I worked hard that you should be above work. What odds, dear boy? Do I tell it fur you to feel a obligation? Not a bit. I tell it, fur you to know as that there hunted dunghill dog wot you kep life in, got his head so high that he could make a gentleman—and, Pip, you're him!"

The abhorrence in which I held the man, the dread I had of him, the repugnance with which I shrank from him, could not have been exceeded if he had been some terrible beast.

"Look'ee here, Pip. I'm your second father. You're my son—more to me nor any son. I've put away money, only for you to spend. When I was a hired-out shepherd in a solitary hut, not seeing no faces but faces of sheep till I half forgot wot men's and women's faces wos like, I see

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yourn. I drops my knife many a time in that hut when I was a eating my dinner or my supper, and I says, 'Here's the boy again, a looking at me whiles I eats and drinks!' I see you there a many times as plain as ever I see you on them misty marshes. 'Lord strike me dead!' I says each time—and I goes out in the open air to say it under the open heavens—'but wot, if I gets liberty and money, I'll make that boy a gentleman!' And I done it. Why, look at you, dear boy! Look at these here lodgings of yourn, fit for a lord! A lord? Ah! You shall show money with lords for wagers, and beat 'em!"

"Don't you mind talking, Pip," said he, after again drawing his sleeve over his eyes and forehead, as the click came in his throat which I well remembered—and he was all the more horrible to me that he was so much in earnest; "you can't do better nor keep quiet, dear boy. You ain't looked slowly forward to this as I have; you wosn't prepared for this, as I wos. But didn't you never think it might be me?"

"O no, no, no," I returned. "Never, never!"

"Well, you see it *wos* me, and single-handed. Never a soul in it but my own self and Mr. Jaggars."

"Let me finish wot I was a-telling you, dear boy. From that there hut and that there hiring-out, I got money left me by my master (which died, and had been the same as me), and got my liberty and went for myself. In every single thing I went for, I went for you. 'Lord strike a blight upon it,' I says, wotever it was I went for, 'if it ain't for him!' It all prospered wonderful. As I giv' you to understand just now, I'm famous for it. It was the money left me, and the gains of the first few year wot I sent home to Mr. Jaggars—all for you—when he first come arter you, agreeable to my letter. . . .

"And then, dear boy, it was a recompense to me, look'ee here, to know in secret that I was making a gentleman. The blood horses of them colonists might fling up the dust over me as I was walking; what do I say? I says to myself, 'I'm making a better gentleman nor ever *you'll* be!' When one of 'em says to another, 'He was a convict, a few years ago, and is an ignorant, common fellow now, for all he's lucky,' what do I say? I says to myself, 'If I ain't a gentleman, nor yet ain't got no learning, I'm the owner of such. All on you owns stock and land; which on you owns a brought-up London gentleman?' This way I kep myself a-going. And this way I held steady afore my mind that

I would for certain come one day and see my boy, and make myself known to him, on his own ground. . . .

"It warn't easy, Pip, for me to leave them parts, nor yet it warn't safe. But I held to it, and the harder it was, the stronger I held, for I was determined, and my mind firm made up. At last I done it. Dear boy, I done it! . . .

"I was sent for life. It's death to come back. There's been overmuch coming back of late years, and I should of a certainty be hanged if took."

Nothing was needed but this; the wretched man, after loading wretched me with his gold and silver chains for years, had risked his life to come to me, and I held it there in my keeping!

V

THE WARMINT'S STORY

This was the story of Magwitch as told to Pip, and his friend Herbert Pocket.

"Dear boy and Pip's comrade. I am not a going fur to tell you my life, like a song or a story-book. But to give it you short and handy, I'll put it at once into a mouthful of English. In jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail. There, you've got it. That's *my* life pretty much, down to such times as I got shipped off, arter Pip stood my friend.

"I've been done everything to, pretty well—except hanged. I've been locked up, as much as a silver tea-kettle. I've been carted here and carted there, and put out of this town and put out of that town, and stuck in the stocks, and whipped and worried and drove. I've no more notion where I was born, than you have—if so much. I first become aware of myself, down in Essex, a thieving turnips for my living. Summun had run away from me—a man—a tinker—and he'd took the fire with him, and left me wery cold.

"I know'd my name to be Magwitch, chrisen'd Abel. How did I know it? Much as I know'd the birds' names in the hedges to be chaffinch, sparrer, thrush. I might have thought it was all lies together, only as the birds' names come out true, I supposed mine did.

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“So fur as I could find, there warn’t a soul that see young Abel Magwitch, with as little on him as in him, but wot caught fright at him, and either drove him off, or took him up. I was took up, took up, took up, to that extent that I reg’larly grow’d up took up.

“This is the way it was, that when I was a ragged little creetur as much to be pitied as ever I see (not that I looked in the glass, for there warn’t many insides of furnished houses known to me), I got the name of being hardened. ‘This is a terrible hardened one,’ they says to prison wisitors, picking out me. ‘May be said to live in jails, this boy.’ Then they looked at me, and I looked at them, and they measured my head, some on ’em—they had better a measured my stomach—and others on ’em giv me tracts what I couldn’t read, and made me speeches what I couldn’t unnerstand. They always went on agen me about the Devil. But what the devil was I to do? I must put something into my stomach, mustn’t I?—Howsomever, I’m a getting low, and I know what’s due. Dear boy and Pip’s comrade, don’t you be afeerd of me being low.

“Tramping, begging, thieving, working sometimes when I could—though that warn’t as often as you may think, till you put the question whether you would ha’ been over-ready to give me work yourselves—a bit of a poacher, a bit of a labourer, a bit of a waggoner, a bit of a haymaker, a bit of a hawker, a bit of most things that don’t pay and lead to trouble, I got to be a man. A deserting soldier in a Traveller’s Rest, what lay hid up to the chin under a lot of tatures, learnt me to read; and a travelling Giant what signed his name at a penny a time learnt me to write. I warn’t locked up as often now as formerly, but I wore out my good share of key-metal still.

“At Epsom races, a matter of over twenty year ago, I got acquainted wi’ a man whose skull I’d crack wi’ this poker, like the claw of a lobster if I’d got it on this hob. His right name was Compeyson; and that’s the man, dear boy, what you see me a pounding in the ditch. . . .

“He set up fur a gentleman, this Compeyson, and he’d been to a public boarding-school and had learning. He was a smooth one to talk, and was a dab at the ways of gentle-folks. He was good-looking too. It was the night afore the great race, when I found him on the heath, in a booth that I know’d on. Him and some more was a sitting among the tables when I went in, and the landlord (which had a

knowledge of me, and was a sporting one) called him out, and said, 'I think this is a man that might suit you'—meaning I was.

"Compeyson, he looks at me very noticing, and I look at him. He has a watch and a chain and a ring and a breast-pin and a handsome suit of clothes.

"'To judge from appearances, you're out of luck,' says Compeyson to me.

"'Yes, master, and I've never been in it much.' (I had come out of Kingston Jail last on a vagrancy committal. Not but what it might have been for something else; but it warn't.)

"'Luck changes,' says Compeyson; 'perhaps yours is going to change.'

"I says, 'I hope it may be so. There's room.'

"'What can you do?' says Compeyson.

"'Eat and drink,' I says; 'if you'll find the materials.'

"Compeyson laughed, looked at me again very noticing, giv me five shillings, and appointed me for next night. Same place.

"I went to Compeyson next night, same place, and Compeyson took me on to be his man and pardner. And what was Compeyson's business in which we was to go pardners? Compeyson's business was the swindling, handwriting forging, stolen bank-note passing, and such-like. All sorts of traps as Compeyson could set with his head, and keep his own legs out of and get the profits from, and let another man in for, was Compeyson's business. He'd no more heart than a iron file, he was as cold as death, and he had the head of the Devil afore mentioned.

"There was another in with Compeyson, as was called Arthur—not as being so chrisen'd, but as a surname. He was in a decline, and was a shadow to look at. Him and Compeyson had been in a bad thing with a rich lady some years afore, and they made a pot of money by it; but Compeyson betted and gamed, and he'd have run through the king's taxes. So, Arthur was a dying and a dying poor and with the horrors on him, and Compeyson's wife (which Compeyson kicked mostly) was a having pity on him when she could, and Compeyson was a having pity on nothing and nobody.

"I might a took warning by Arthur, but I didn't; and I won't pretend I was partick'ler—for where 'ud be the good on it, dear boy and comrade? So I begun wi' Compeyson, and a poor

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tool I was in his hands. Arthur lived at the top of Compeyson's house (over nigh Brentford it was), and Compeyson kept a careful account agen him for board and lodging, in case he should ever get better to work it out. . . . Not to go into the things that Compeyson planned, and I done—which 'ud take a week—I'll simply say to you, dear boy, and Pip's comrade, that that man got me into such nets as made me his black slave. I was always in debt to him, always under his thumb, always a working, always a getting into danger. He was younger than me, but he'd got craft, and he'd got learning, and he overmatched me five hundred times told and no mercy. . . .

“I was tried, alone, for misdemeanour, while with Compeyson . . . and got convicted. As to took up on suspicion, that was twice or three times in the four or five year that it lasted; but evidence was wanting. At last, me and Compeyson was both committed for felony—on a charge of putting stolen notes in circulation—and there was other charges behind. Compeyson says to me, ‘Separate defences, no communication,’ and that was all. And I was so miserable poor, that I sold all the clothes I had, except what hung on my back, afore I could get Jagers.

“When we was put in the dock, I noticed first of all what a gentleman Compeyson looked, wi' his curly hair and his black clothes and his white pocket-handkercher, and what a common sort of a wretch I looked. When the prosecution opened and the evidence was put short, aforehand, I noticed how heavy it all bore on me, and how light on him. When the evidence was giv' in the box, I noticed how it was always me that had come for'ard, and could be swore to, how it was always me that the money had been paid to, how it was always me that had seemed to work the thing and get the profit. But, when the defence come on, then I see the plan plainer; for, says the counsellor for Compeyson, ‘My lord and gentlemen, here you has afore you, side by side, two persons as your eyes can separate wide; one, the younger, well brought up, who will be spoke to as such; one, the elder, ill brought up, who will be spoke to as such; one, the younger, seldom if ever seen in these here transactions, and only suspected; t'other, the elder, always seen in 'em and always wi' his guilt brought home. Can you doubt, if there is but one in it, which is the one, and if there is two in it, which is much the worst one?’ And such-like. And when it come to character, warn't it Compeyson as had been

to school, and warn't it his schoolfellows as was in this position and in that, and warn't it him as had been know'd by witnesses in such clubs and societies, and nowt to his disadvantage? And warn't it me as had been tried afore, and as had been know'd up hill and down dale in Bridewells and Lock-Ups? And when it come to speech-making, warn't it Compeyson as could speak to 'em wi' his face dropping every now and then into his white pocket-handkercher—ah! and wi' verses in his speech, too—and warn't it me as could only say, 'Gentlemen, this man at my side is a most precious rascal'? And when the verdict come, warn't it Compeyson as was recommended to mercy on account of good character and bad company, and giving up all the information he could agen me, and warn't it me as got never a word but Guilty? And when I says to Compeyson, 'Once out of this court, I'll smash that face of yourn!' ain't it Compeyson as prays the Judge to be protected, and gets two turnkeys stood betwixt us? And when we're sentenced, ain't it him as gets seven year, and me fourteen, and ain't it him as the Judge is sorry for, because he might a done so well, and ain't it me as the Judge perceives to be a old offender of wiolet passion, likely to come to worse?"

He had worked himself into a state of great excitement, but he checked it, took two or three short breaths, swallowed as often, and stretching out his hand towards me, said, in a reassuring manner, "I ain't a going to be low, dear boy!"

He had so heated himself that he took out his handkerchief and wiped his face and head and neck and hands, before he could go on.

"I had said to Compeyson that I'd smash that face of his, and I swore Lord smash mine! to do it. We was in the same prison-ship, but I couldn't get at him for long, though I tried. At last I come behind him and hit him on the cheek to turn him round and get a smashing one at him, when I was seen and seized. The black-hole of that ship warn't a strong one, to a judge of black-holes that could swim and dive. I escaped to the shore, and I was a hiding among the graves there, envying them as was in 'em and all over, when I first see my boy!"

He regarded me with a look of affection that made him almost abhorrent to me again, though I had felt great pity for him.

"By my boy, I was giv to understand as Compeyson was out on them marshes too. Upon my soul, I half believe

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he escaped in his terror, to get quit of me, not knowing it was me as had got ashore. I hunted him down. I smashed his face. 'And now,' says I, 'as the worst thing I can do, caring nothing for myself, I'll drag you back.' And I'd have swum off, towing him by the hair, if it had come to that, and I'd a got him aboard without the soldiers.

"Of course he'd much the best of it to the last—his character was so good. He had escaped when he was made half-wild by me and my murderous intentions; and his punishment was light. I was put in irons, brought to trial again, and sent for life. I didn't stop for life, dear boy and Pip's comrade, being here."

He wiped himself again, as he had done before, and then slowly took his tangle of tobacco from his pocket, and plucked his pipe from his button-hole, and slowly filled it, and began to smoke.

"Is he dead?" I asked after a silence.

"Is who dead, dear boy?"

"Compeyson."

"He hopes *I* am, if he's alive, you may be sure," with a fierce look. "I never heard no more of him."

VI

A DASH FOR LIBERTY

Magwitch's return was not un-noticed. Compeyson was again the informer and traducer. Apart from this, Pip had long ago made up his mind that he could not continue to receive money at the hands of Provis (as Magwitch was now called) and that Provis's safety must be his first care. It was decided therefore that he should go to Holland: Magwitch readily acquiesced: wherever his "dear boy" went, there would he willingly follow. Fearing they were being watched, Pip and his friends made very elaborate precautions for smuggling Magwitch out of the country, the first stage of which was a journey in a rowing boat down the Thames to a point below Gravesend, where they could board the out-going steamer.

'He was the least anxious of any of us. He was not indifferent, for he told me that he hoped to live to see his gentleman one of the best of gentlemen in a foreign country; he was

not disposed to be passive or resigned, as I understood it; but he had no notion of meeting danger half way. When it came upon him, he confronted it, but it must come before he troubled himself.

“If you knowed, dear boy,” he said to me, “what it is to sit here alonger my dear boy and have my smoke, arter having been day by day betwixt four walls, you’d envy me. But you don’t know what it is.”

“I think I know the delights of freedom,” I answered.

“Ah,” said he, shaking his head gravely. “But you don’t know it equal to me. You must have been under lock and key, dear boy, to know it equal to me—but I ain’t a-going to be low. . . .”

“We’d be puzzled to be more quiet and easy-going than we are at present. But—it’s a flowing so soft and pleasant through the water, p’raps, as makes me think it—I was a-thinking through my smoke just then, that we can no more see to the bottom of the next few hours, than we can see to the bottom of this river what I catches hold of. Nor yet we can’t no more hold their tide than I can hold this. And it’s run through my fingers and gone, you see!” holding up his dripping hand.’

Events, however, did not turn out quite as happily as had been expected. They were within sight of the continental steamer when the police galley which had been chasing hailed them;

““You have a returned Transport there,” said the man who held the lines. “That’s the man, wrapped in the cloak. His name is Abel Magwitch, otherwise Provis. I apprehend that man, and call upon him to surrender, and you to assist.”

At the same moment, without giving any audible direction to his crew, he ran the galley aboard of us. . . . In the same moment, I saw the steersman of the galley lay his hand on his prisoner’s shoulder, and saw that both boats were swinging round with the force of the tide, and saw that all hands on board the steamer were running forward quite frantically. Still in the same moment, I saw the prisoner start up, lean across his captor, and pull the cloak from the neck of the shrinking sitter in the galley. Still in the same moment, I saw that the face disclosed, was the face of the other convict of long ago. Still in the same moment, I saw

the face tilt backward with a white terror on it that I shall never forget, and heard a great cry on board the steamer and a loud splash in the water, and felt the boat sink from under me. . . . As it came nearer, I saw it to be Magwitch, swimming, but not swimming freely. He was taken on board, and instantly manacled at the wrists and ankles. . . .

‘At length we . . . pulled under the shore towards the tavern we had lately left. . . . Here I was able to get some comforts for Magwitch—Provis no longer— . . .

He told me that he believed himself to have gone under the keel of the steamer, and to have been struck on the head in rising. The injury to his chest (which rendered his breathing extremely painful) he thought he had received against the side of the galley. He added that he did not pretend to say what he might or might not have done to Compeyson, but, that in the moment of his laying his hand on his cloak to identify him, that villain had staggered up and staggered back, and they had both gone overboard together; when the sudden wrenching of him (Magwitch) out of our boat, and the endeavour of his captor to keep him in it, had capsized us. He told me in a whisper that they had gone down, fiercely locked in each other’s arms, and that there had been a struggle under water, and that he had disengaged himself, struck out, and swam away. . . .’

VII

BROUGHT BACK

‘We remained at the public-house until the tide turned, and then Magwitch was carried down to the galley and put on board . . . and when I took my place by Magwitch’s side, I felt that that was my place henceforth while he lived.

For now my repugnance to him had all melted away, and in the hunted, wounded, shackled creature who held my hand in his, I only saw a man who had meant to be my benefactor, and who had felt affectionately, gratefully, and generously towards me with great constancy through a series of years. . . .

As we returned towards the setting sun we had yesterday left behind us, and as the stream of our hopes seemed all

running back, I told him how grieved I was to think that he had come home for my sake.

"Dear boy," he answered, "I'm quite content to take my chance. I've seen my boy, and he can be a gentleman without me."

No. I had thought about that, while we had been there side by side. No. Apart from any inclinations of my own . . . I foresaw that, being convicted, his possessions would be forfeited to the Crown.

"Look'ee here, dear boy," said he. "It's best as a gentleman should not be knowed to belong to me now. Only come to see me as if you come by chance alonger Wemmick. Sit where I can see you when I am swore to, for the last o' many times, and I don't ask no more."

"I will never stir from your side," said I, "when I am suffered to be near you. Please God, I will be as true to you, as you have been to me!"

I felt his hand tremble as it held mine, and he turned his face away as he lay in the bottom of the boat, and I heard that old sound in his throat—softened now, like all the rest of him. . . .

The trial was very short and very clear. Such things as could be said for him, were said—how he had taken to industrious habits, and had thriven lawfully and reputably. But, nothing could unsay the fact that he had returned, and was there in presence of the Judge and Jury. It was impossible to try him for that, and do otherwise than find him guilty. . . .

The appointed punishment for his return to the land that had cast him out being Death, and his case being this aggravated case, he must prepare himself to Die. . . .'

Magwitch received his sentence unmoved: he rose and said to the judge: "My Lord, I have received my sentence of Death from the Almighty, but I bow to yours," and sat down again.

What dignity was expressed in those simple words: how we love Magwitch for it, and realise how much his character had to do with the wonderful transformation that had come over Pip.

In spite of the earnest and ceaseless efforts made by Pip to secure a remission of the death penalty—even if only on account of the accused's present state of health, there

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was no chance of a reprieve of any sort: but the words he had said to the Judge were to come true: Magwitch died before the law could exact its penalty.

VIII

THE DEATH OF MAGWITCH

'The daily visits I could make him were shortened now, and he was more strictly kept. Seeing, or fancying, that I was suspected of an intention of carrying poison to him, I asked to be searched before I sat down at his bedside, and told the officer who was always there that I was willing to do anything that would assure him of the singleness of my designs. Nobody was hard with him, or with me. There was duty to be done, and it was done, but not harshly. The officer always gave me the assurance that he was worse, and some other sick prisoners in the room, and some other prisoners who attended on them as sick nurses (malefactors, but not incapable of kindness, GOD be thanked!), always joined in the same report.

As the days went on, I noticed more and more that he would lie placidly looking at the white ceiling, with an absence of light in his face, until some word of mine brightened it for an instant, and then it would subside again. Sometimes he was almost, or quite, unable to speak; then, he would answer me with slight pressures on my hand, and I grew to understand his meaning very well.

The number of days had risen to ten, when I saw a greater change in him than I had seen yet. His eyes were turned towards the door, and lighted up as I entered.

"Dear boy," he said, as I sat down by his bed: "I thought you was late. But I knowed you couldn't be that."

"It is just the time," said I. "I waited for it at the gate."

"You always waits at the gate; don't you, dear boy?"

"Yes. Not to lose a moment of the time."

"Thank'ee, dear boy, thank'ee. God bless you! You've never deserted me, dear boy."

I pressed his hand in silence, for I could not forget that I had once meant to desert him.

"And what's the best of all," he said, "you've been more comfortable alonger me, since I was under a dark cloud, than when the sun shone. That's best of all."

He lay on his back, breathing with great difficulty. Do what he could, and love me though he did, the light left his face ever and again, and a film came over the placid look at the white ceiling.

"Are you in much pain to-day?"

"I don't complain of none, dear boy."

"You never do complain."

He had spoken his last words. He smiled, and I understood his touch to mean that he wished to lift my hand, and lay it on his breast. I laid it there, and he smiled again, and put both his hands upon it.

The allotted time ran out, while we were thus; but, looking round, I found the governor of the prison standing near me, and he whispered, "You needn't go yet." I thanked him gratefully, and asked, "Might I speak to him, if he can hear me?"

The governor stepped aside, and beckoned the officer away. The change, though it was made without noise, drew back the film from the placid look at the white ceiling, and he looked most affectionately at me.

"Dear Magwitch, I must tell you, now at last. You understand what I say?"

A gentle pressure on my hand.

"You had a child once, whom you loved and lost."

A stronger pressure on my hand.

"She lived and found powerful friends. She is living now. She is a lady and very beautiful. And I love her!"

With a last faint effort, which would have been powerless but for my yielding to it, and assisting it, he raised my hand to his lips. Then he gently let it sink upon his breast again, with his own hands lying on it. The placid look at the white ceiling came back, and passed away, and his head dropped quietly on his breast.

Mindful, then, of what we had read together, I thought of the two men who went up into the Temple to pray, and I knew there were no better words that I could say beside his bed, than "O Lord, be merciful to him a sinner!"

There is some redeeming virtue even in the basest of mankind; Magwitch the rogue and vagabond has our entire sympathy and affection. He is among the greatest characters ever drawn in fiction.



CHAPTER FIVE

THE GREAT ADVENTURER

I

MEETING THE PICKWICKIANS

“ALFRED JINGLE, Esquire of No Hall, Nowhere”. Such was his fitting, self-styled designation. A sad scamp, but a lovable one, was Jingle, and never did an author pen a finer picture of a vagabond, than did Dickens of Jingle in *The Pickwick Papers*.

‘He was about the middle height, but the thinness of his body, and the length of his legs, gave him the appearance of being much taller. The green coat had been a smart dress garment in the days of swallow-tails, but had evidently in those times adorned a much shorter man than the stranger, for the soiled and faded sleeves scarcely reached to his wrists. It was buttoned closely up to his chin, at the imminent hazard of splitting the back; and an old stock, without a vestige of shirt collar, ornamented his neck. His scanty black trousers displayed here and there those shiny patches which bespeak long service, and were strapped

very tightly over a pair of patched and mended shoes, as if to conceal the dirty white stockings, which were nevertheless distinctly visible. His long black hair escaped in negligent waves from beneath each side of his old pinched up hat; and glimpses of his bare wrists might be observed between the tops of his gloves, and the cuffs of his coat sleeves. His face was thin and haggard; but an indescribable air of jaunty impudence and perfect self-possession pervaded the whole man.'

By profession he was an actor and was about to fulfil an engagement at the Rochester Theatre when he fell in with Mr. Pickwick and his three friends just starting off on their first journey. At The Golden Cross, Charing Cross, he had the good fortune to rescue Mr. Pickwick from the attack of the pugnacious cabman.

On the announcement being made that the coach was about to start—

“Commodore!” said the stranger, starting up, “my coach,—place booked,—one outside—leave you to pay for the brandy and water,—want change for a five,—bad silver—Brummagem buttons—won’t do—no go—eh?” and he shook his head most knowingly.’

The Pickwickians also being bound for Rochester, invited him to join them and together they occupied the seat at the back of the coach. Asked by the coachman if he had any luggage, Jingle replied: “Brown paper parcel here, that’s all,—other luggage gone by water,—packing cases, nailed up—big as houses—heavy, heavy, damned heavy”; and we are told that “he forced into his pocket as much as he could of the brown paper parcel, which presented most suspicious indications of containing one shirt and a handkerchief.”

Then came Jingle’s first and amazing story that never ceases to amuse us.

“Heads, heads—take care of your heads!” cried the loquacious stranger, as they came out under the low archway, which in those days formed the entrance to the coach-yard. “Terrible place—dangerous work—other day—five children—mother—tall lady, eating sandwiches—forgot the arch—crash—knock—children look round—mother’s head off—sandwich in her hand—no mouth to put it in—head of a

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family off—shocking, shocking! Looking at Whitehall, sir?—fine place—little window—somebody else’s head off there, eh, sir?—he didn’t keep a sharp look-out enough either—eh, sir, eh?”’

And with talks of Philosophy, Poetry and Love, the coach speeded on its way. His stories were racy; and his hearers, delighted.

II

THE ADVENTURE AT THE BALL

Arrived at Rochester, and asked if he also put up at the Bull Inn in the High Street, Jingle declared:

“Here—not I—but you’d better—good house—nice beds—Wright’s next house, dear—very dear—half-a-crown in the bill if you look at the waiter—charge you more if you dine at a friend’s than they would if you dined in the coffee-room—rum fellows—very.”

Mr. Winkle turned to Mr. Pickwick, and murmured a few words; a whisper passed from Mr. Pickwick to Mr. Snodgrass, from Mr. Snodgrass to Mr. Tupman, and nods of assent were exchanged. Mr. Pickwick addressed the stranger.

“You rendered us a very important service this morning, sir, will you allow us to offer a slight mark of our gratitude by begging the favour of your company at dinner?”

“Great pleasure—not presume to dictate, but broiled fowl and mushrooms—capital thing! what time?”

“Let me see,” replied Mr. Pickwick, referring to his watch, “it is now nearly three. Shall we say five?”

“Suit me excellently,” said the stranger, “five precisely—till then—care of yourselves;” and lifting the pinched-up hat a few inches from his head, and carelessly replacing it very much on one side, the stranger, with half the brown paper parcel sticking out of his pocket, walked briskly up the yard, and turned into the High Street.’

The dinner was a great success. Jingle had “divested himself of his brown paper parcel, but had made no alteration in his attire; and was if possible, more loquacious than ever”.

The bottle was passed, and Jingle took wine with all the others "almost as rapidly as he talked", and proposed among other things, "Kent sir, everybody knows Kent, apples, cherries, hops and women".

There were signs of preparations being made for a ball. "Devil of a mess on the staircase—forms going up—carpenters coming down—lamps, glasses, harps."

"The wine was passed, and a fresh supply ordered. The visitor talked, the Pickwickians listened. Mr. Tupman felt every moment more disposed for the ball. Mr. Pickwick's countenance glowed with an expression of universal philanthropy; and Mr. Winkle and Mr. Snodgrass fell fast asleep.

"They're beginning up-stairs," said the stranger—"hear the company—fiddles tuning—now the harp—there they go." The various sounds which found their way down-stairs announced the commencement of the first quadrille.

"How I should like to go," said Mr. Tupman, again.

"So should I," said the stranger—"confounded luggage—heavy smacks—nothing to go in—odd; ain't it?"

Then it was that Tupman whispered that Mr. Winkle's dress suit with the Pickwick Club buttons would fit Jingle to a nicety, and having spun a coin to decide who was to pay (of course it was Mr. Tupman!) they purchased the tickets and "in another quarter of an hour the stranger was completely arrayed in a full suit of Mr. Nathaniel Winkle's."

Among the party at the Ball was a Dr. Slammer, who was paying attentions to a widow "whose rich dress and profusion of ornament bespoke her a most desirable addition to a limited income." Jingle was not slow to grasp this fact. "I'll dance with the widow. Lots of money—pompous doctor—cut out the doctor—here goes"—and he did; "the stranger and Mrs. Budger took their places in the quadrille . . . the stranger was young and the widow was flattered . . . Dr. Slammer was paralysed!"

The widow danced with Mr. Tupman, too, and at the close of the Ball, when Jingle had seen her to her carriage, Dr. Slammer challenged Jingle on the staircase.

"Sir!" said the Doctor, in an awful voice, producing a card, and retiring into an angle of the passage, "my name

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is Slammer, Doctor Slammer, sir—97th Regiment—Chatham Barracks—my card, sir, my card.” He would have added more, but his indignation choked him.

“Ah!” replied the stranger, coolly, “Slammer—much obliged—polite attention—not ill now, Slammer—but when I am—knock you up.”

“You—you’re a shuffler! sir,” gasped the furious Doctor, “a poltroon—a coward—a liar—a—a—will nothing induce you to give me your card, sir!”

“Oh! I see,” said the stranger, half aside, “negus too strong here—liberal landlord—very foolish—very—lemonade much better—hot rooms—elderly gentlemen—suffer for it in the morning—cruel—cruel;” and he moved on a step or two.

“You are stopping in this house, sir,” said the indignant little man; “you are intoxicated now, sir; you shall hear from me in the morning, sir. I shall find you out, sir; I shall find you out.”

“Rather you found me out than found me at home,” replied the unmoved stranger.’

III

THE WRONG MAN

The sequel came next morning when the unoffending Winkle was aroused from his sleep to fight a duel with the enraged Doctor. Fortunately for Mr. Winkle—who had a sad knowledge of firearms—the Doctor recognised that he was “not the man”, so the whole party returned to the Bull Inn. Meanwhile Jingle had called at the Bull with a fellow actor to introduce him to Mr. Pickwick and his friends.

“Lots of anecdote,” said the green-coated stranger of the day before, advancing to Mr. Winkle and speaking in a low and confidential tone. “Rum fellow—does the heavy business—no actor—strange man—all sorts of miseries—Dismal Jemmy, we call him on the circuit.”

The arrival of Dr. Slammer revealed that Jingle was the real offender, and although the valiant Doctor yearned for satisfaction his second objected:

“He is a strolling actor,” said the Lieutenant, contemptuously; turning to Dr. Slammer—“He acts in the

piece that the Officers of the 52nd get up at the Rochester Theatre to-morrow night. You cannot proceed in this affair, Slammer—impossible!” and with a reminder to Mr. Pickwick that “the best way of avoiding a recurrence of such scenes in future, will be to be more select in the choice of your companions,” the Lieutenant bounced out of the room.

This naturally enraged Mr. Pickwick, and he would have given chase had not Jingle restrained him—

“Leave him alone, brandy and water—jolly old gentleman—lots of pluck—swallow this—ah!—capital stuff.” Having previously tested the virtues of a bumper, which had been mixed by the dismal man, the stranger applied the glass to Mr. Pickwick’s mouth; and the remainder of its contents rapidly disappeared.

There was a short pause; the brandy and water had done its work; the amiable countenance of Mr. Pickwick was fast recovering its customary expression.

“They are not worth your notice,” said the dismal man.

“You are right, sir,” replied Mr. Pickwick, “they are not. I am ashamed to have been betrayed into this warmth of feeling. Draw your chair up to the table, sir.”

Thus it was that Jingle came out of this escapade in rather a better light than he would otherwise have done, and was granted a further lease of life with the Pickwickians.

IV

THE SNAKE IN THE GRASS

The most memorable adventure in the life of Alfred Jingle had its beginning at the cricket match between Dingley Dell and All-Muggleton a few days later. “He had, somehow or other, contracted an acquaintance with the All-Muggletons, which he had converted, by a process peculiar to himself, into that extent of good fellowship on which a general invitation may be easily founded.”

“Capital game—smart sport—fine exercise—very,” were the words which fell upon Mr. Pickwick’s ear as he entered

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the tent; and the first object that met his eyes was his green-coated friend of the Rochester coach, holding forth, to the no small delight and edification of a select circle of the chosen of All-Muggleton.'

An introduction to their host was a natural sequence:

“‘Friend of yours!—My dear sir, how are you?—Friend of *my* friend’s—give me your hand, sir”—and the stranger grasped Mr. Wardle’s hand with all the fervour of a close intimacy of many years, and then stepped back a pace or two as if to take a full survey of his face and figure, and then shook hands with him again, if possible, more warmly than before.’

After the Match, Mr. Wardle was invited by the Dingley Dell Club to bring his friends to “partake of a plain dinner at the Blue Lion”, which was accepted, Mr. Jingle of course joining in the general conviviality, and obliging with a song in which the words “bowl” “sparkling” “ruby” “bright” and “wine” were frequently repeated at short intervals; and when, at a very late hour, the party, accompanied by Mr. Jingle, returned to Dingley Dell they put their condition down to the influence of the salmon!!

V

JINGLE MAKES LOVE TO THE SPINSTER AUNT

Jingle, the friend so far, was now to turn out a snake in the grass. He ingratiated himself with all the ladies—particularly the deaf old mother of Mr. Wardle who laughingly referred to him as “an impudent young fellow”.

Overhearing the Fat Boy disclose to old Mrs. Wardle that the elderly spinster Miss Rachael had been discovered “a kissin’ and huggin’” Mr. Tupman, he resolves on a plan

“to lay siege to the heart of the spinster aunt, without delay”.

“Can I see—lovely creature—sacrificed at the shrine—heartless avarice? Tupman only wants your money.”

"The wretch," exclaimed the spinster aunt. (Mr. Jingle's doubts were resolved. She *had* money).

"The breakfast-parlour door was partially open. He peeped in. The spinster aunt was knitting. He coughed; she looked up and smiled. Hesitation formed no part of Mr. Alfred Jingle's character. He laid his finger on his lips mysteriously, walked in, and closed the door.

"Miss Wardle," said Mr. Jingle, with affected earnestness, "forgive intrusion—short acquaintance—no time for ceremony—all discovered."

"Hush!" said Mr. Jingle, in a stage whisper;—"large boy—dumpling face—round eyes—rascal!" Here he shook his head expressively, and the spinster aunt trembled with agitation.

"I presume you allude to Joseph, sir?" said the lady, making an effort to appear composed.

"Yes, ma'am—damn that Joe!—treacherous dog, Joe—told the old lady—old lady furious—wild—raving—arbour—Tupman—kissing and hugging—all that sort of thing—eh, ma'am—eh?"

"Mr. Jingle," said the spinster aunt, "if you come here, sir, to insult me——"

"Not at all—by no means," replied the unabashed Mr. Jingle;—"overheard the tale—came to warn you of your danger—tender my services—prevent the hubbub. Never mind—think it an insult—leave the room"—and he turned, as if to carry the threat into execution.

"What *shall* I do!" said the poor spinster, bursting into tears. "My brother will be furious."

"Of course he will," said Mr. Jingle pausing—"outrageous."

"Oh, Mr. Jingle, what *can* I say!" exclaimed the spinster aunt, in another flood of despair.

"Say he dreamt it," replied Mr. Jingle, coolly.

A ray of comfort darted across the mind of the spinster aunt at this suggestion. Mr. Jingle perceived it, and followed up his advantage.

"Pooh, pooh!—nothing more easy—blackguard boy—lovely woman—fat boy horsewhipped—you believed—end of the matter—all comfortable."

Telling Miss Rachael that in reality Mr. Tupman loved the "short girl—black eyes—niece Emily," and telling

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her to "watch 'em . . . he'll pay her every possible attention,"

'Mr. Jingle fell on his knees, remained thereupon for five minutes thereafter: and rose the accepted lover of the spinster aunt: conditionally upon Mr. Tupman's perjury being made clear and manifest.

The burden of proof lay with Mr. Alfred Jingle; and he produced his evidence that very day at dinner. The spinster aunt could hardly believe her eyes. Mr. Tracy Tupman was established at Emily's side, ogling, whispering, and smiling, in opposition to Mr. Snodgrass. Not a word, not a look, not a glance, did he bestow upon his heart's pride of the evening before.'

* * * * *

'The following conversation serves to explain the apparently unaccountable alteration of deportment on the part of Mr. Tracy Tupman. . . .

"How did I do it?" he inquired.

"Splendid—capital—couldn't act better myself—you must repeat the part to-morrow—every evening, till further notice."

"Does Rachael still wish it?"

"Of course—she don't like it—but must be done—avert suspicion—afraid of her brother—says there's no help for it—only a few days more—when old folks blinded—crown your happiness."

"Any message?"

"Love—best love—kindest regards—unalterable affection. . . .

"Oh, my friend!" said poor Mr. Tupman grasping the hand of his companion, "receive my warmest thanks for your disinterested kindness; and forgive me if I have ever, even in thought, done you the injustice of supposing that you *could* stand in my way. My dear friend, can I ever repay you?"

"Don't talk of it," replied Mr. Jingle. He stopped short, as if suddenly recollecting something, and said—"By-the-bye—can't spare ten pounds, can you?—very particular purpose—pay you in three days."

"I dare say I can," replied Mr. Tupman, in the fulness of his heart. "Three days, you say?"

"Only three days—all over then—no more difficulties."

Mr. Tupman counted the money into his companion's hand, and he dropped it piece by piece into his pocket, as they walked towards the house.

“Be careful,” said Mr. Jingle—“not a look.”

“Not a wink,” said Mr. Tupman.

“Not a syllable.””

VI

THE ELOPEMENT

A few days later the guests at supper at Mr. Wardle's were startled with the news from the Fat Boy that “They ha' gone, Mas'r!—gone right clean off, sir!

“Mus'r Jingle and Miss Rachael, in a po'-chay, from Blue Lion, Muggleton. I was there; but I couldn't stop 'em; so I run off to tell'ee.”

“I paid his expenses!” said Mr. Tupman, jumping up frantically. “He's got ten pounds of mine!—stop him!—he's swindled me!—I won't bear it!—I'll have justice, Pickwick!—I won't stand it!” and off started Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Wardle in pursuit. In spite of being two hours to the bad, they made rapid progress and after a few hours' fast driving came up with Jingle and the spinster aunt; but at that very moment an accident happened to their chaise, away rolled a wheel and over went the vehicle!

‘Mr. Jingle was contemplating the wreck from the coach-window, with evident satisfaction. The day was just breaking, and the whole scene was rendered perfectly visible by the grey light of the morning.

“Hallo!” shouted the shameless Jingle, “anybody damaged?—elderly gentlemen—no light weights—dangerous work—very.”

“You're a rascal!” roared Wardle.

“Ha! ha!” replied Jingle; and then he added, with a knowing wink, and a jerk of the thumb towards the interior of the chaise—“I say—she's very well—desires her compliments—begs you won't trouble yourself—love to *Tuppy*—won't you get up behind?—drive on, boys.”

The postilions resumed their proper attitudes, and away rattled the chaise, Mr. Jingle fluttering in derision a white handkerchief from the coach-window.'

The next morning witnessed the couple taking breakfast at the White Hart in the Borough. Sam Weller—who had

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just made his first appearance—was interrogated respecting Doctors' Commons and Jingle departed to obtain the necessary marriage licence.

“Don't be long,” said the spinster, affectionately, as Mr. Jingle stuck the pinched-up hat on his head.

“Long away from *you*?—Cruel charmer,” and Mr. Jingle skipped playfully up to the spinster aunt, imprinted a chaste kiss upon her lips, and danced out of the room.

“Dear man!” said the spinster as the door closed after him.

“Rum old girl,” said Mr. Jingle, as he walked down the passage.'

How Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Wardle hit upon the White Hart in the Borough as the probable destination of the runaways, is not explained: but they turned up just in time to prevent the matter going further, and with them Perker, the lawyer.

'Old Wardle opened the door; and the whole three walked into the room just as Mr. Jingle, who had that moment returned, had produced the licence to the spinster aunt.

The spinster uttered a loud shriek, and, throwing herself in a chair, covered her face with her hands. Mr. Jingle crumpled up the licence, and thrust it into his coat-pocket. The unwelcome visitors advanced into the middle of the room.'

Jingle tried the bold course—and was successful. “She's her own mistress—see who dares to take her away—unless she wishes it.”

Rachael did not wish it, and Mr. Perker's advice was all in favour of a compromise. Mr. Wardle agreeing that he'd rather suffer any pecuniary loss “than submit to this disgrace and let her, fool as she is, be made miserable for life”, Mr. Perker took Jingle into the next room, and said “Now my dear sir, we know very well that you have run off with this lady for the sake of her money” . . . Mr. Jingle's face gradually relaxed, and something distantly resembling a wink quivered for an instant in his left eye”.

“Very good, very good,” said the little man, observing the impression he had made. “Now the fact is, that beyond

a few hundreds, the lady has little or nothing till the death of her mother—fine old lady, my dear sir.”

“*Old*,” said Mr. Jingle, briefly, but emphatically.

“Why, yes,” said the attorney with a slight cough. “You are right, my dear sir, she is *rather* old. She comes of an old family though, my dear sir; old in every sense of the word. The founder of that family came into Kent, when Julius Cæsar invaded Britain;—only one member of it, since, who hasn’t lived to eighty-five, and *he* was beheaded by one of the Henrys. The old lady is not seventy-three, now, my dear sir.” The little man paused, and took a pinch of snuff.

“Well,” cried Mr. Jingle.

“Well, my dear sir—you don’t take snuff!—ah! so much the better—expensive habit—well, my dear sir, you’re a fine young man, man of the world—able to push your fortune, if you had capital, eh?”

“Well,” said Mr. Jingle again.

“Do you comprehend me?”

“Not quite.”

“Don’t you think—now, my dear sir, I put it to you, *don’t* you think—that fifty pounds and liberty, would be better than Miss Wardle and expectation?”

“Won’t do—not half enough!” said Mr. Jingle rising.

“Nay, nay, my dear sir,” remonstrated the little attorney, seizing him by the button. “Good round sum—a man like you could treble it in no time—great deal to be done with fifty pounds, my dear sir.”

“More to be done with a hundred and fifty,” replied Mr. Jingle, coolly.

“Well, my dear sir, we won’t waste time in splitting straws,” resumed the little man, “say—say—seventy.”

“Won’t do,” said Mr. Jingle.

“Don’t go away, my dear sir—pray don’t hurry,” said the little man. “Eighty; come: I’ll write you a cheque at once.”

“Won’t do,” said Mr. Jingle.

“Well, my dear sir, well,” said the little man, still detaining him; “just tell me what *will* do.”

“Expensive affair,” said Mr. Jingle. “Money out of pocket—posting, nine pounds; licence, three—that’s twelve—compensation, a hundred—hundred and twelve—Breach of honour—and loss of the lady—”

“Yes, my dear sir, yes,” said the little man, with a knowing

look, "never mind the last two items. That's a hundred and twelve—say a hundred—come."

"And twenty," said Mr. Jingle.'

Accordingly at one hundred and twenty pounds the compromise was arrived at, and the unabashed Jingle departed, saying "Bye, bye, Pickwick", and tossed the licence to his feet, with the parting injunction to "get the name altered—take home the lady—do for Tuppy."

VII

ALIAS FITZ-MARSHALL

Mr. Jingle certainly enlivened the journeys of the Pickwickians. Those worthies had only just got over the Eatanswill Election humours when they fell in again with Mr. Jingle at the Fête Champêtre given by Mrs. Leo Hunter at "The Den". Here he was introduced as Mr. Charles Fitz-Marshall, and on encountering "the indignant orbs of Mr. Pickwick", quickly made off, proffering the lamest excuse.

Inquiring as to his residence, and being told it was the Angel at Bury St. Edmunds not many miles away, Mr. Pickwick gave chase. "How do we know whom he is deceiving there? I'll expose him!"

At the Angel Hotel at Bury St. Edmunds, an accomplice is introduced in the person of Job Trotter—first encountered by Sam whilst having a "twopenny shower bath" at the pump in the Inn yard, "a young fellow in mulberry-coloured livery, reading what appeared to be a hymn-book, with an air of deep abstraction.

"You're a rum 'un to look at, you are!" thought Mr. Weller, the first time his eyes encountered the glance of the stranger in the mulberry suit: who had a large, sallow, ugly face, very sunken eyes, and a gigantic head, from which depended a quantity of lank, black hair."

To Sam, this man confided that his master was one, Fitz-Marshall, upon hearing which Sam invited him to have "a drop o' something" and adjourned to the tap, and "were soon occupied in discussing an exhilarating compound,

formed by mixing together, in a pewter vessel, certain quantities of British Hollands, and the fragment essence of the clove."

Here Sam learned that the master was "going to run away with an immense rich heiress, from boarding-school." Job Trotter complained that the proposed elopement preyed upon his mind:

"If I knew any respectable gentleman who would take the matter up, I might have some hope of preventing the elopement;" and blissfully unconscious of the trap that had been set for him, Sam took Job to his master: with many tears in his eyes, Job told his tale, received a guinea for his trouble, and arranged to meet Mr. Pickwick at the garden gate that evening to catch his master in the very act!

But, of course, when it was too late, Mr. Pickwick found that the schoolmistress was entirely ignorant of either Mr. Charles Fitz-Marshall, or of Mr. Jingle, or of any elopement, and then Mr. Pickwick saw how completely he had been duped.

"Jingle suspected my design, and set that fellow on you, with this story, I suppose?" said Mr. Pickwick, half choking.

"Just that, sir," replied Mr. Weller.

"It was all false, of course?"

"All, sir," replied Mr. Weller. "Regular do, sir; artful dodge."

"I don't think he'll escape us quite so easily the next time, Sam?" said Mr. Pickwick.

"I don't think he will, sir."

"Whenever I meet that Jingle again, wherever it is," said Mr. Pickwick, raising himself in bed, and indenting his pillow with a tremendous blow, "I'll inflict personal chastisement on him, in addition to the exposure he so richly merits. I will, or my name is not Pickwick."

"And whenever I catches hold o' that there melan-cholly chap with the black hair," said Sam, "if I don't bring some real water into his eyes, for once in a way, my name a'nt Weller. Good night, sir!"

VIII

THE FINAL ENCOUNTER

We next meet Jingle at Ipswich whither Mr. Pickwick had followed him. Here, posing again as Captain Fitz-Marshall, Jingle had made himself a *persona grata* with the family of Nupkins, the Mayor of Ipswich. Sam Weller made the discovery, and imparted it to his master just at the time when Mr. Pickwick and his friends had been brought before the Mayor on a charge of a breach of the peace. It was with great difficulty that Mr. Pickwick was able to induce the pompous Mayor to do anything so unconstitutional as to give him a few moments' conversation in private. But at last he succeeded, and surprised the Mayor with his story of the "gross imposter" he was harbouring in his house. All that was necessary to prove his words, said Mr. Pickwick with his usual vehemence, was that he should be confronted with him. A little later in the day this opportunity was afforded Mr. Pickwick and his friends; and this was the scene that presented itself to Sam Weller on entering the parlour.

'It was an impressive tableau. Alfred Jingle, Esquire, alias Captain Fitz-Marshall, was standing near the door with his hat in his hand, and a smile on his face, wholly unmoved by his very unpleasant situation. Confronting him, stood Mr. Pickwick, who had evidently been inculcating some high moral lesson; for his left hand was beneath his coat tail, and his right extended in air, as was his wont when delivering himself of an impressive address. At a little distance, stood Mr. Tupman with indignant countenance, carefully held back by his two younger friends; at the further end of the room were Mr. Nupkins, Mrs. Nupkins, and Miss Nupkins, gloomily grand, and savagely vexed.

"What prevents me," said Mr. Nupkins, with magisterial dignity, as Job was brought in: "what prevents me from detaining these men as rogues and impostors? It is a foolish mercy. What prevents me?"

"Pride, old fellow, pride," replied Jingle, quite at his ease. "Wouldn't do—no go—caught a captain, eh?—ha! ha! very good—husband for daughter—biter bit—make it public—not for worlds—look stupid—very!"



Captain Fitz-Marshall



In the Fleet

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“Wretch,” said Mrs. Nupkins, “we scorn your base insinuations.”

“I always hated him,” added Henrietta.

“Oh, of course,” said Jingle. “Tall young man—old lover—Sidney Porckenham—rich—fine fellow—not so rich as captain, though?—turn him away—off with him—anything for captain—nothing like captain anywhere—all the girls—raving mad—eh, Job?”

Here Mr. Jingle laughed very heartily; and Job, rubbing his hands with delight, uttered the first sound he had given vent to, since he entered the house—a low noiseless chuckle, which seemed to intimate that he enjoyed his laugh too much, to let any of it escape in sound.

“Mr. Nupkins,” said the elder lady, “this is not a fit conversation for the servants to overhear. Let these wretches be removed.”

“Certainly, my dear,” said Mr. Nupkins. “Muzzle!”

“Your worship.”

“Open the front door.”

“Yes, your worship.”

“Leave the house!” said Mr. Nupkins, waving his hand emphatically.

Jingle smiled, and moved towards the door.

“Stay!” said Mr. Pickwick.

Jingle stopped.

“I might,” said Mr. Pickwick, “have taken a much greater revenge for the treatment I have experienced at your hands, and that of your hypocritical friend there.”

Job Trotter bowed with great politeness, and laid his hand upon his heart.

“I say,” said Mr. Pickwick, growing gradually angry, “that I might have taken a greater revenge, but I content myself with exposing you, which I consider a duty I owe to society. This is a leniency, sir, which I hope you will remember.”

When Mr. Pickwick arrived at this point, Job Trotter, with facetious gravity, applied his hand to his ear, as if desirous not to lose a syllable he uttered.

“And I have only to add, sir,” said Mr. Pickwick, now thoroughly angry, “that I consider you a rascal, and a—a ruffian—and—and worse than any man I ever saw or heard of, except that pious and sanctified vagabond in the mulberry livery.”

“Ha! ha!” said Jingle, “good fellow, Pickwick—fine heart—stout old boy—but must *not* be passionate—bad

thing, very—bye, bye—see you again some day—keep up your spirits—now, Job—trot!”

With these words, Mr. Jingle stuck on his hat in the old fashion, and strode out of the room.’

IX

JINGLE IN THE DEBTOR'S PRISON

The last encounter of all was in the Fleet Prison: both Mr. Pickwick and Jingle were there, each for quite a different reason. Mr. Pickwick was visiting the poor prisoners' quarters of the Fleet;

‘The general aspect of the room recalled him to himself at once; but he had no sooner cast his eyes on the figure of a man who was brooding over the dusty fire, than, letting his hat fall on the floor, he stood perfectly fixed, and immovable, with astonishment.

Yes; in tattered garments, and without a coat; his common calico shirt, yellow and in rags; his hair hanging over his face; his features changed with suffering, and pinched with famine; there sat Mr. Alfred Jingle; his head resting on his hand, his eyes fixed upon the fire, and his whole appearance denoting misery and dejection! . . .

Turning his eyes towards the door they encountered a new comer; and in him, through his rags and dirt, he recognised the familiar features of Mr. Job Trotter.

“Mr. Pickwick!” exclaimed Job aloud.

“Eh?” said Jingle, starting from his seat. “Mr.—! So it is—queer place—strange things—serves me right—very.” Mr. Jingle thrust his hands into the place where his trousers pockets used to be, and, dropping his chin upon his breast, sank back into his chair.

Mr. Pickwick was affected; the two men looked so very miserable. The sharp involuntary glance Jingle had cast at a small piece of raw loin of mutton, which Job had brought in with him, said more of their reduced state than two hours' explanation could have done. Mr. Pickwick looked mildly at Jingle, and said:

“I should like to speak to you in private. Will you step out for an instant?”

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“Certainly,” said Jingle, rising hastily. “Can’t step far—no danger of over-walking yourself here—Spike park—grounds pretty—romantic, but not extensive—open for public inspection—family always in town—housekeeper desperately careful—very.”

“You have forgotten your coat,” said Mr. Pickwick, as they walked out to the staircase, and closed the door after them.

“Eh?” said Jingle. “Spout—dear relation—uncle Tom—couldn’t help it—must eat, you know. Wants of nature—and all that.”

“What do you mean?”

“Gone, my dear sir—last coat—can’t help it. Lived on a pair of boots—whole fortnight. Silk umbrella—ivory handle—week—fact—honour—ask Job—knows it.”

“Lived for three weeks upon a pair of boots and a silk umbrella with an ivory handle!” exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, who had only heard of such things in shipwrecks, or read of them in Constable’s Miscellany.

“True,” said Jingle, nodding his head. “Pawnbroker’s shop—duplicates here—small sums—mere nothing—all rascals.”

“Oh,” said Mr. Pickwick, much relieved by this explanation; “I understand you. You have pawned your wardrobe.”

“Everything—Job’s too—all shirts gone—never mind—saves washing. Nothing soon—lie in bed—starve—die—Inquest—little bone-house—poor prisoner—common necessaries—hush it up—gentlemen of the jury—warden’s tradesmen—keep it snug—natural death—coroner’s order—workhouse funeral—serve him right—all over—drop the curtain.”

Jingle delivered this singular summary of his prospects in life, with his accustomed volubility, and with various twitches of the countenance to counterfeit smiles. Mr. Pickwick easily perceived that his recklessness was assumed, and looking him full, but not unkindly, in the face, saw that his eyes were moist with tears.

“Good fellow,” said Jingle, pressing his hand, and turning his head away. “Ungrateful dog—boyish to cry—can’t help it—bad fever—weak—ill—hungry. Deserved it all—but suffered much—very.” Wholly unable to keep up appearances any longer, and perhaps rendered worse by the effort he had made, the dejected stroller sat down on the stairs, and, covering his face with his hands, sobbed like a child.

“Come, come,” said Mr. Pickwick, with considerable emotion, “we’ll see what can be done, when I know all about the matter. Here, Job; where is that fellow?”

“Here, sir,” replied Job, presenting himself on the staircase. We have described him, by-the-bye, as having deeply-sunken eyes, in the best of times. In his present state of want and distress, he looked as if those features had gone out of town altogether.

“Here, sir,” cried Job.

“Come here, sir,” said Mr. Pickwick, trying to look stern, with four large tears running down his waistcoat. “Take that, sir.”

Take what? In the ordinary acceptation of such language, it should have been a blow. As the world runs, it ought to have been a sound, hearty cuff; for Mr. Pickwick had been duped, deceived, and wronged by the destitute outcast who was now wholly in his power. Must we tell the truth? It was something from Mr. Pickwick’s waistcoat-pocket, which chinked as it was given into Job’s hand, and the giving of which, somehow or other imparted a sparkle to the eye, and a swelling to the heart, of our excellent old friend, as he hurried away.’

* * * * *

On Mr. Pickwick securing his own release from the Fleet he was not forgetful of his old—and now reformed—enemy. Through his solicitor, Mr. Perker, he made arrangements for both Jingle and Job Trotter to obtain their discharge and to start life afresh in the West Indies, and we take farewell of our great adventurer and his accomplice at the office of Mr. Perker in Grays Inn.

“Deliver this letter to the agent when you reach Liverpool, and let me advise you, gentlemen, not to be too knowing in the West Indies,” said Mr. Perker. “If you throw away this chance, you will both richly deserve to be hanged, as I sincerely trust you will be. And now you had better leave Mr. Pickwick and me alone, for we have other matters to talk over, and time is precious.” As Perker said this, he looked towards the door, with an evident desire to render the leave-taking as brief as possible.

It was brief enough on Mr. Jingle’s part. He thanked the little attorney in a few hurried words for the kindness and promptitude with which he had rendered his assistance,

and, turning to his benefactor, stood for a few seconds as if irresolute what to say or how to act. Job Trotter relieved his perplexity; for, with a humble and a grateful bow to Mr. Pickwick, he took his friend gently by the arm, and led him away.

“A worthy couple!” said Perker, as the door closed behind them.

“I hope they may become so,” replied Mr. Pickwick. “What do you think? Is there any chance of their permanent reformation?”

Perker shrugged his shoulders doubtfully, but observing Mr. Pickwick’s anxious and disappointed look, rejoined:

“Of course there is a chance. I hope it may prove a good one. They are unquestionably penitent now; but then, you know, they have the recollection of very recent suffering fresh upon them. What they may become, when that fades away, is a problem that neither you nor I can solve. However, my dear sir,” added Perker, laying his hand on Mr. Pickwick’s shoulder, “your object is equally honourable, whatever the result is. Whether that species of benevolence which is so very cautious and long-sighted that it is seldom exercised at all, lest its owner should be imposed upon, and so wounded in his self-love, be real charity or a worldly counterfeit, I leave to wiser heads than mine to determine.”



CHAPTER SIX

ARTFUL DODGERS

I

“THE ARTFUL”

“HULLO my covey! What’s the row?” was the greeting which Oliver Twist received on the cold doorstep of a house in “the little town of Barnet . . . the seventh morning after he had left his native place”.

It was given him by a boy about his own age; one of the queerest looking boys that Oliver had ever seen.

‘He was a snub-nosed, flat-browed, common-faced boy enough; and as dirty a juvenile as one would wish to see, but he had about him all the airs and manners of a man. He was short of his age: with rather bow-legs, and little, sharp, ugly eyes. His hat was stuck on the top of his head so lightly, that it threatened to fall off every moment—and would have done so, very often, if the wearer had not had a knack of every now and then giving his head a sudden twitch, which brought it back to its old place again. He wore a man’s coat, which reached nearly to his heels. He had turned the cuffs back,

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half-way up his arm, to get his hands out of the sleeves: apparently with the ultimate view of thrusting them into the pockets of his corduroy trousers; for there he kept them. He was, altogether, as roosting and swaggering a young gentleman as ever stood four feet six, or something less, in his bluchers as he had a rather flighty and dissolute mode of conversing, and furthermore avowed that among his intimate friends he was better known by the *sobriquet* of "The Artful Dodger."

What the Dodger was doing so far away from London is never explained—but we need not seek for an explanation of every movement in the life of this famous rogue and vagabond. Oliver explained to his new acquaintance that he had been "walking for seven days".

"Walking for sivin days!" said the young gentleman. "Oh, I see. Beak's order, eh? But," he added, noticing Oliver's look of surprise, "I suppose you don't know what a beak is, my flash com-pan-i-on?"

Oliver mildly replied, that he had always heard a bird's mouth described by the term in question.

"My eyes, how green!" exclaimed the young gentleman. "Why, a beak's a madgst'rate; and when you walk by a beak's order, it's not straight forerd, but always a going up, and nivir a coming down agin. Was you never on the mill?"

"What mill?" inquired Oliver.

"What mill! Why, *the* mill—the mill as takes up so little room that it'll work inside a Stone Jug; and always goes better when the wind's low with people, than when it's high; acos then they can't get workmen. But come," said the young gentleman; "you want grub, and you shall have it. I'm at low-water-mark myself—only one bob and a magpie; but, *as far as* it goes, I'll fork out and stump. Up with you on your pins. There! Now then! Morrice!"

With the ham and bread purchased at the adjacent chandler's shop, they made a hearty meal at a small public house, and the question of a night's lodging arising,

"Don't fret your eyelids on that score," said the young gentleman. "I've got to be in London to-night; and I

know a 'spectable old genelman as lives there, wot'll give you lodgings for nothink, and never ask for the change—that is, if any genelman he knows interduces you. And don't he know me? Oh, no! Not in the least! By no means. Certainly not!"'

II

THE MERRY OLD GENTLEMAN

And so, Oliver Twist arrived in London at the house near Field Lane by Saffron Hill, where Fagin, the Jew fence and receiver, trained youths in the noble art of pick-pocketing. Having given the pass words "Plummy and slam," the Dodger entered the dirty back room on the floor above and introduced "A new pal—from Greenland".

'Several rough beds made of old sacks were huddled side by side on the floor. Seated round the table were four or five boys, none older than the Dodger, smoking long clay pipes, and drinking spirits with the air of middle-aged men. These all crowded about their associate as he whispered a few words to the Jew; and then turned round and grinned at Oliver. So did the Jew himself, toasting-fork in hand.

"This is him, Fagin," said Jack Dawkins; "my friend Oliver Twist."

The Jew grinned; and, making a low obeisance to Oliver, took him by the hand, and hoped he should have the honour of his intimate acquaintance. Upon this, the young gentlemen with the pipes came round him, and shook both his hands very hard—especially the one in which he held his little bundle. One young gentleman was very anxious to hang up his cap for him; and another was so obliging as to put his hands in his pockets, in order that, as he was very tired, he might not have the trouble of emptying them, himself, when he went to bed. These civilities would probably have been extended much farther, but for a liberal exercise of the Jew's toasting-fork on the heads and shoulders of the affectionate youths who offered them.'

The next morning Oliver received his first lesson from the merry old gentleman and his hopeful pupils, following

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the conversation which Fagin had with the Dodger and Charley Bates on their return from their morning walk.

“Well,” said the Jew, glancing slyly at Oliver, and addressing himself to the Dodger, “I hope you’ve been at work this morning, my dears?”

“Hard,” replied the Dodger.

“As nails,” added Charley Bates.

“Good boys, good boys!” said the Jew. “What have you got, Dodger?”

“A couple of pocket-books,” replied that young gentleman.

“Lined?” inquired the Jew, with eagerness.

“Pretty well,” said the Dodger, producing two pocket-books; one green, and the other red.

“Not so heavy as they might be,” said the Jew, after looking at the insides carefully; “but very neat and nicely made. Ingenious workman, ain’t he, Oliver?”

“Very, indeed, sir,” said Oliver. At which Mr. Charles Bates laughed uproariously; very much to the amazement of Oliver, who saw nothing to laugh at in anything that had passed.

“And what have you got, my dear?” said Fagin to Charley Bates.

“Wipes,” replied Master Bates; at the same time producing four pocket handkerchiefs.

“Well,” said the Jew, inspecting them closely; “they’re very good ones, very. You haven’t marked them well, though, Charley; so the marks shall be picked out with a needle, and we’ll teach Oliver how to do it. Shall us, Oliver, eh? Ha! ha! ha!”

“If you please, sir,” said Oliver.

“You’d like to be able to make pocket-handkerchiefs as easy as Charley Bates, wouldn’t you, my dear?” said the Jew.

“Very much, indeed, if you’ll teach me, sir,” replied Oliver.

Master Bates saw something so exquisitely ludicrous in this reply that he burst into another laugh; which laugh, meeting the coffee he was drinking, and carrying it down some wrong channel, very nearly terminated in his premature suffocation.

“He is so jolly green!” said Charley when he recovered, as an apology to the company for his unpolite behaviour.

The Dodger said nothing, but he smoothed Oliver's hair over his eyes, and said he'd know better, by-and-bye. . . .

When the breakfast was cleared away, the merry old gentleman and the two boys played at a very curious and uncommon game, which was performed in this way. The merry old gentleman, placing a snuff-box in one pocket of his trousers, a note-case in the other, and a watch in his waistcoat pocket, with a guard-chain round his neck, and sticking a mock diamond pin in his shirt, buttoned his coat tight round him, and putting his spectacle-case and handkerchief in his pockets, trotted up and down the room with a stick, in imitation of the manner in which old gentlemen walk about the streets any hour in the day. Sometimes he stopped at the fire-place, and sometimes at the door, making believe that he was staring with all his might into shop-windows. At such times he would look constantly round him, for fear of thieves, and would keep slapping all his pockets in turn, to see that he hadn't lost anything, in such a very funny and natural manner, that Oliver laughed till the tears ran down his face. All this time the two boys followed him closely about: getting out of his sight, so nimbly, every time he turned round, that it was impossible to follow their motions. At last, the Dodger trod upon his toes, or ran upon his boot accidentally, while Charley Bates stumbled up against him from behind: and in that one moment they took from him, with the most extraordinary rapidity, snuff-box, note-case, watch-guard, chain, shirt pin, pocket-handkerchief, even the spectacle case. If the old gentleman felt a hand in any one of his pockets, he cried out where it was; and then the game began all over again.

When this game had been played a great many times, a couple of young ladies called, one of whom was named Bet, and the other Nancy. They wore a good deal of hair, not very neatly turned up behind, and were rather untidy about the shoes and stockings. . . .

At length, Charley Bates expressed his opinion that it was time to pad the hoof. This, it occurred to Oliver, must be French for going out; for, directly afterwards, the Dodger, and Charley, and the two young ladies, went away together, having been kindly furnished by the amiable old Jew with money to spend.

"There, my dear," said Fagin. "That's a pleasant life, isn't it? They have gone out for the day. . . ."

“Make ’em your models, my dear. Make ’em your models,” tapping the fire-shovel on the hearth to add force to his words; “do everything they bid you, and take their advice in all matters—especially the Dodger’s, my dear. He’ll be a great man himself, and will make you one too, if you take pattern by him.—Is my handkerchief hanging out of my pocket, my dear?” said the Jew, stopping short.

“Yes, sir,” said Oliver.

“See if you can take it out, without my feeling it: as you saw them do, when we were at play this morning.”

Oliver held up the bottom of the pocket with one hand, as he had seen the Dodger hold it, and drew the handkerchief lightly out of it with the other.

“Is it gone?” cried the Jew.

“Here it is, sir,” said Oliver, showing it in his hand.

“You’re a clever boy, my dear,” said the playful old gentleman, patting Oliver on the head approvingly. “I never saw a sharper lad. Here’s a shilling for you. If you go on, in this way, you’ll be the greatest man of the time. And now come here, and I’ll show you how to take the marks out of the handkerchiefs.”

Oliver wondered what picking the old gentleman’s pocket in play had to do with his chances of being a great man. But, thinking that the Jew, being so much his senior, must know best, he followed him quietly to the table, and was soon deeply involved in his new study.’

III

“THE ARTFUL” LOSES HIS CHARGE

One morning Oliver was allowed to accompany the others to their “work”, and the three boys sallied out; “the Dodger with his coat-sleeves tucked up, and his hat cocked, as usual; Master Bates sauntering along with his hands in his pockets; and Oliver between them, wondering where they were going, and what branch of manufacture he would be instructed in first.”

Nothing happened, however, beyond the mere playfulness of the Dodger and Charley, until all at once Oliver noticed a very mysterious change of behaviour on the part of the Dodger.

An old gentleman was standing at a book-stall: Charley Bates called him "a prime plant". The gentleman "had taken up a book from the stall, and there he stood, reading away, as hard as if he were in his elbow-chair, in his own study. What was Oliver's horror and alarm . . . to see the Dodger plunge his hand into the old gentleman's pocket, and draw from thence a handkerchief! To see him hand the same to Charley Bates; and finally to behold them, both, running away round the corner at full speed. In an instant the whole mystery of the handkerchiefs, and the watches, and the jewels, and the Jew, rushed upon the boy's mind."

Oliver was so alarmed, that he too ran off with all his might, and raised the cry of "stop thief",—but was arrested. Meanwhile,

"Master Bates uttered an exclamation of amusement and delight; and, bursting into an uncontrollable fit of laughter, flung himself upon a door-step, and rolled thereon in a transport of mirth.

"What's the matter?" inquired the Dodger.

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Charley Bates.

"Hold your noise," remonstrated the Dodger, looking cautiously round. "Do you want to be grabbed, stupid?"

"I can't help it," said Charley, "I can't help it! To see him splitting away at that pace, and cutting round the corners, and knocking up again the posts, and starting on again as if he was made of iron as well as them, and me with the wipe in my pocket, singing out arter him—oh, my eye!" The vivid imagination of Master Bates presented the scene before him in too strong colours. As he arrived at this apostrophe, he again rolled upon the door-step, and laughed louder than before.

"What'll Fagin say?" inquired the Dodger; taking advantage of the next interval of breathlessness on the part of his friend to propound the question.

"What?" repeated Charley Bates.

"Ah, what?" said the Dodger.

"Why, what should he say?" inquired Charley: stopping rather suddenly in his merriment; for the Dodger's manner was impressive. "What should he say?"

Mr. Dawkins whistled for a couple of minutes; then, taking off his hat, scratched his head, and nodded thrice.

"What do you mean?" said Charley.

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“Toor rul lol loo, gammon and spinnage, the frog he wouldn’t, and high cockolorum,” said the Dodger: with a slight sneer on his intellectual countenance.

This was explanatory, but not satisfactory. Master Bates felt it so; and again said, “What do you mean?”

The Dodger made no reply; but putting his hat on again, and gathering the skirts of his long-tailed coat under his arm, thrust his tongue into his cheek, slapped the bridge of his nose some half-dozen times in a familiar but expressive manner, and turning on his heel, slunk down the court. Master Bates followed, with a thoughtful countenance.

The noise of footsteps on the creaking stairs, a few minutes after the occurrence of this conversation, roused the merry old gentleman as he sat over the fire with a saveloy and a small loaf in his left hand; a pocket-knife in his right; and a pewter pot on the trivet. There was a rascally smile on his white face as he turned round, and, looking sharply out from under his thick red eyebrows, bent his ear towards the door, and listened.

“Why, how’s this?” muttered the Jew, changing countenance; “only two of ’em? Where’s the third? They can’t have got into trouble. Hark!”

The footsteps approached nearer; they reached the landing. The door was slowly opened; and the Dodger and Charley Bates entered, closing it behind them.

“Where’s Oliver?” said the Jew, rising with a menacing look. “Where’s the boy?”

The young thieves eyed their preceptor as if they were alarmed at his violence; and looked uneasily at each other. But they made no reply.

“What’s become of the boy?” said the Jew, seizing the Dodger tightly by the collar, and threatening him with horrid imprecations. “Speak out, or I’ll throttle you!”

Mr. Fagin looked so very much in earnest, that Charley Bates, who deemed it prudent in all cases to be on the safe side, and who conceived it by no means improbable that it might be his turn to be throttled second, dropped upon his knees, and raised a loud, well-sustained, and continuous roar—something between a mad bull and a speaking-trumpet.

“Will you speak?” thundered the Jew, shaking the Dodger so much that his keeping in the big coat at all seemed perfectly miraculous.

“Why, the traps have got him, and that’s all about it,” said the Dodger sullenly. “Come, let go o’ me, will you!”

And, swinging himself, at one jerk, clean out of the big coat, which he left in the Jew's hands, the Dodger snatched up the toasting-fork, and made a pass at the merry old gentleman's waistcoat; which, if it had taken effect, would have let a little more merriment out, than could have been easily replaced.'

IV

THE RETURN TO THE FOLD

But Oliver was not in the hands of the police for long: he was released and taken care of by Mr. Brownlow (the old gentleman who had been robbed) and began to live a happy life. This was shortly terminated by his capture by Sikes and Nancy, and once again he found himself in the den of thieves near Saffron Hill, presided over by Fagin.

““Oh, my wig, my wig!” cried Master Charles Bates, from whose lungs the laughter had proceeded; “here he is! oh, cry, here he is! Oh, Fagin, look at him! Fagin, do look at him! I can't bear it; it is such a jolly game, I can't bear it. Hold me, somebody, while I laugh it out.”

With this irrepressible ebullition of mirth, Master Bates laid himself flat on the floor: and kicked convulsively for five minutes in an ecstasy of facetious joy. Then jumping to his feet, he snatched the cleft stick from the Dodger; and, advancing to Oliver, viewed him round and round; while the Jew, taking off his nightcap, made a great number of low bows to the bewildered boy. The Artful, meantime, who was of a rather saturnine disposition, and seldom gave way to merriment when it interfered with business, rifled Oliver's pockets with steady assiduity.

“Look at his togs, Fagin!” said Charley, putting the light so close to his new jacket as nearly to set him on fire. “Look at his togs! Superfine cloth, and the heavy swell cut! Oh, my eye, what a game! And his books, too! Nothing but a gentleman, Fagin!”

“Delighted to see you looking so well, my dear,” said the Jew, bowing with mock humility. “The Artful shall give you another suit, my dear, for fear you should spoil that Sunday one. Why didn't you write, my dear, and say you were coming? We'd have got something warm for supper.”



“Look at his togs! Oh my eye, what a game! Nothing but a gentleman, Fagin!”

At this, Master Bates roared again: so loud, that Fagin himself relaxed, and even the Dodger smiled; but as the Artful drew forth the five-pound note at that instant, it is doubtful whether the sally or the discovery awakened his merriment.

"Hallo! what's that?" inquired Sikes, stepping forward as the Jew seized the note. "That's mine, Fagin."

"No, no, my dear," said the Jew. "Mine, Bill, mine. You shall have the books."

"If that ain't mine!" said Bill Sikes, putting on his hat with a determined air; "mine and Nancy's, that is; I'll take the boy back again."

The Jew started. Oliver started too, though from a very different cause; for he hoped that the dispute might really end in his being taken back.

"Come! Hand over, will you?" said Sikes.

"This is hardly fair, Bill; hardly fair, is it, Nancy?" inquired the Jew.

"Fair, or not fair," retorted Sikes, "hand over, I tell you! Do you think Nancy and me has got nothing else to do with our precious time but to spend it in scouting arter and kidnapping every young boy as gets grabbed through you? Give it here, you avaricious old skeleton, give it here!"

With this gentle remonstrance, Mr. Sikes plucked the note from between the Jew's finger and thumb; and looking the old man coolly in the face, folded it up small, and tied it in his neckerchief.

"That's for our share of the trouble," said Sikes; "and not half enough, neither. You may keep the books, if you're fond of reading. If you a'n't, sell 'em."

"They're very pretty," said Charley Bates: who, with sundry grimaces, had been affecting to read one of the volumes in question: "beautiful writing, isn't it, Oliver?" At sight of the dismayed look with which Oliver regarded his tormentors, Master Bates, who was blessed with a lively sense of the ludicrous, fell into another ecstasy, more boisterous than the first.'

V

THE DODGER'S PHILOSOPHY

Oliver's education during the ensuing weeks, until the burglary at Chertsey relieved him of the company of these

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Artful Dodgers, is an amazing piece of writing, and sufficiently explains the characters of the principal inmates of Fagin's den.

‘Whether it was the goodness of the tobacco that soothed the feelings of the Dodger, or the mildness of the beer that mollified his thoughts, he was evidently tinctured, for the nonce, with a spice of romance and enthusiasm, foreign to his general nature. He looked down on Oliver, with a thoughtful countenance, for a brief space; and then, raising his head, and heaving a gentle sigh, said, half in abstraction, and half to Mr. Bates—

“What a pity it is he isn't a prig!”

“Ah!” said Master Charles Bates; “he don't know what's good for him.”

“I suppose you don't even know what a prig is?” said the Dodger mournfully.

“I think I know that,” replied Oliver, looking up. “It's a th—; you're one, are you not?” inquired Oliver, checking himself.

“I am,” replied the Dodger. “I'd scorn to be anything else.” Mr. Dawkins gave his hat a ferocious cock, after delivering this sentiment, and looked at Master Bates, as if to denote that he would feel obliged by his saying anything to the contrary.

“I am,” repeated the Dodger. “So's Charley. So's Fagin. So's Sikes. So's Nancy. So's Bet. So we all are, down to the dog. And he's the downiest one of the lot!”

“And the least given to peaching,” added Charley Bates.

“He wouldn't so much as bark in a witness-box, for fear of committing himself; no, not if you tied him up in one, and left him there without wittles for a fortnight,” said the Dodger.

“Not a bit of it,” observed Charley. . . .

“Well, well,” said the Dodger, recurring to the point from which they had strayed: with that mindfulness of his profession which influenced all his proceedings. “This hasn't got anything to do with young Green here.”

“No more it has,” said Charley. “Why don't you put yourself under Fagin, Oliver?”

“And make your fortun' out of hand?” added the Dodger, with a grin.

"And so be able to retire on your property, and do the gen-teel, as I mean to, in the very next leap-year but four that ever comes, and the forty-second Tuesday in Trinity-week," said Charley Bates.

"I don't like it," rejoined Oliver timidly; "I wish they would let me go. I—I—would rather go."

"And Fagin would *rather* not!" rejoined Charley.

Oliver knew this too well; but thinking it might be dangerous to express his feelings more openly, he only sighed, and went on with his boot-cleaning.

"Go!" exclaimed the Dodger. "Why, where's your spirit? Don't you take any pride out of yourself? Would you go and be dependent on your friends?"

"Oh, blow that!" said Master Bates, drawing two or three silk handkerchiefs from his pocket, and tossing them into a cupboard, "that's too mean; that is."

"I couldn't do it," said the Dodger, with an air of haughty disgust.

"You can leave your friends, though," said Oliver, with a half smile; "and let them be punished for what you did."

"That," rejoined the Dodger, with a wave of his pipe—"that was all out of consideration for Fagin, 'cause the traps know that we work together, and he might have got into trouble if we hadn't made our lucky; that was the move, wasn't it, Charley?"

Master Bates nodded assent, and would have spoken; but the recollection of Oliver's flight came so suddenly upon him, that the smoke he was inhaling got entangled with a laugh, and went up into his head, and down into his throat; and brought on a fit of coughing and stamping, about five minutes long.

"Look here!" said the Dodger, drawing forth a handful of shillings and halfpence; "here's a jolly life! What's the odds where it comes from? Here, catch hold; there's plenty more where they were took from. You won't, won't you? Oh, you precious flat!"

"It's naughty, ain't it, Oliver?" inquired Charley Bates. "He'll come to be scragged, won't he?"

"I don't know what that means," replied Oliver.

"Something in this way, old feller," said Charley. As he said it, Master Bates caught up an end of his neckerchief; and, holding it erect in the air, dropped his head on his shoulder, and jerked a curious sound through his teeth:

thereby indicating, by a lively pantomimic representation, that scragging and hanging were one and the same thing.

"That's what it means," said Charley. "Look how he stares, Jack! I never did see such prime company as that 'ere boy; he'll be the death of me, I know he will." Master Charles Bates, having laughed heartily again, resumed his pipe with tears in his eyes.

"You've been brought up bad," said the Dodger, surveying his boots with much satisfaction when Oliver had polished them. "Fagin will make something of you, though, or you'll be the first he ever had that turned out unprofitable. You'd better begin at once; for you'll come to the trade long before you think of it; and you're only losing time, Oliver."

Master Bates backed this advice with sundry moral admonitions of his own: which, being exhausted, he and his friend Mr. Dawkins launched into a glowing description of the numerous pleasures incidental to the life they led, interspersed with a variety of hints to Oliver that the best thing he could do would be to secure Fagin's favour without more delay, by the means which they themselves had employed to gain it.

"And always put this in your pipe, Nolly," said the Dodger, as the Jew was heard unlocking the door above, "if you don't take fogles and tickers——"

"What's the good of talking in that way?" interposed Master Bates; "he don't know what you mean."

"If you don't take pocket-handkerchers and watches," said the Dodger, reducing his conversation to the level of Oliver's capacity, "some other cove will; so that the coves that lose 'em will be all the worse, and you'll be all the worse too, and nobody half a ha'porth the better, except the chaps wot gets them—and you've just as good a right to them as they have."

"To be sure, to be sure!" said the Jew, who had entered, unseen by Oliver. "It all lies in a nutshell, my dear; in a nutshell, take the Dodger's word for it. Ha! ha! ha! He understands the catechism of his trade."

The old man rubbed his hands gleefully together, as he corroborated the Dodger's reasoning in these terms; and chuckled with delight at his pupil's proficiency.'

VI

THE DODGER ARRESTED

The Dodger was at length arrested.

"You should have known the Dodger, my dear; you should have known the Dodger," said Fagin with pride to Noah Claypole (alias Morris Bolter) when what he termed his "best hand" had been taken from him.

"If they don't get any fresh evidence, it'll only be a summary conviction, and we shall have him back again after six weeks or so; but, if they do, it's a case of lagging. They know what a clever lad he is; he'll be a lifer. They'll make the Artful nothing less than a lifer."

"What do you mean by lagging and a lifer?" demanded Mr. Bolter. "What's the good of talking in that way to me; why don't yer speak so as I can understand yer?"

Fagin was about to translate these mysterious expressions into the vulgar tongue; and, being interpreted, Mr. Bolter would have been informed that they represented that combination of words, "transportation for life," when the dialogue was cut short by the entry of Master Bates, with his hands in his breeches-pockets, and his face twisted into a look of semi-comical woe.

"It's all up, Fagin," said Charley, when he and his new companion had been made known to each other.

"What do you mean?"

"They've found the gentleman as owns the box; two or three more's a coming to 'dentify him; and the Artful's booked for a passage out," replied Master Bates. "I must have a full suit of mourning, Fagin, and a hatband, to wisit him in, afore he sets out upon his travels. To think of Jack Dawkins—lummy Jack—the Dodger—the Artful Dodger—going abroad for a common twopenny-halfpenny sneeze-box! I never thought he'd a done it under a gold watch, chain, and seals, at the lowest. Oh, why didn't he rob some rich old gentleman of all his walables, and go out *as* a gentleman, and not like a common prig, without no honour nor glory!"

With this expression of feeling for his unfortunate friend, Master Bates sat himself on the nearest chair with an aspect of chagrin and despondency.

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“What do you talk about his having neither honour nor glory for?” exclaimed Fagin, darting an angry look at his pupil. “Wasn’t he always top-sawyer among you all! Is there one of you that could touch him or come near him on any scent? Eh?”

“Not one,” replied Master Bates, in a voice rendered husky by regret; “not one.”

Charley Bates was sorely tried because his friend would not “stand in the Newgate Calendar.” “Oh my eye, my eye, wot a blow it is.” This gave great satisfaction to Fagin, who remarked with a chuckle to a new recruit, “See what a pride they take in their profession, my dears, ain’t it beautiful;” and to Charley Bates he added, “Think how young he is too. What a distinction Charley, to be lagged at his time of life.”

“Well it is an honour, that is,” said Charley, a little consoled, so that

‘Master Bates, who had at first been disposed to consider the imprisoned Dodger rather in the light of a victim, now looked upon him as the chief actor in a scene of most uncommon and exquisite humour, and felt quite impatient for the arrival of the time when his old companion should have so favourable an opportunity of displaying his abilities.

“Ha! ha! ha!” cried Charley Bates. “I see it all afore me, upon my soul I do, Fagin. What a game! What a regular game! All the big-wigs trying to look solemn, and Jack Dawkins addressing of ’em as intimate and comfortable as if he was the judge’s own son making a speech arter dinner—ha! ha! ha!”

“We must know how he gets on to-day, by some handy means or other,” said Fagin. “Let me think.”

“Shall I go?” asked Charley.

“Not for the world,” replied Fagin. “Are you mad, my dear, stark mad, that you’d walk into the very place where—No, Charley, no. One is enough to lose at a time.”

So Noah Claypole, being as yet unknown to the police, was sent to report the trial to the remainder of the company, and the scene he witnessed was as follows.

VII

THE ARTFUL DODGER IN THE DOCK

'It was indeed Mr. Dawkins, who, shuffling into the office with the big coat sleeves tucked up as usual, his left hand in his pocket, and his hat in his right hand, preceded the jailer, with a rolling gait altogether indescribable, and, taking his place in the dock, requested in an audible voice to know what he was placed in that 'ere disgraceful situation for.

"Hold your tongue, will you?" said the jailer.

"I'm an Englishman, ain't I?" rejoined the Dodger. "Where are my privileges?"

"You'll get your privileges soon enough," retorted the jailer, "and pepper with 'em."

"We'll see wot the Secretary of State for the Home Affairs has got to say to the beaks, if I don't," replied Mr. Dawkins. "Now then! Wot is this here business? I shall thank the madg'strates to dispose of this here little affair, and not to keep me while they read the paper, for I've got an appointment with a genelman in the City, and as I'm a man of my word, and wery punctual in business matters, he'll go away if I ain't there to my time, and then pr'aps there won't be an action for damage against them as kep me away. Oh no, certainly not!"

At this point, the Dodger, with a show of being very particular with a view to proceedings to be had thereafter, desired the jailer to communicate "the names of them two files as was on the bench." Which so tickled the spectators, that they laughed almost as heartily as Master Bates could have done if he had heard the request.

"Silence there!" cried the jailer.

"What is this?" inquired one of the magistrates.

"A pick-pocketing case, your worship."

"Has the boy ever been here before?"

"He ought to have been, a many times," replied the jailer. "He has been pretty well everywhere else. I know him well, your worship."

"Oh! you know me, do you!" cried the Artful, making a note of the statement. "Wery good. That's a case of deformation of character, any way."

Here there was another laugh, and another cry of silence.

"Now then, where are the witnesses?" said the clerk.

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“Ah! that’s right,” added the Dodger. “Where are they? I should like to see ’em.”’

The witnesses having been produced—the policeman who had seen the Artful attempt a gentleman’s pocket and had arrested the accused, on whose person he had found a silver snuff box—and the gentleman in question, the owner of the snuff box, the magistrate asked the Artful,

“Have you anything to ask this witness, boy?”

“I wouldn’t abase myself by descending to hold no conversation with him,” replied the Dodger.

“Have you anything to say at all?”

“Do you hear his worship ask if you’ve anything to say?” inquired the jailer, nudging the silent Dodger with his elbow.

“I beg your pardon,” said the Dodger, looking up with an air of abstraction. “Did you redress yourself to me, my man?”

“I never see such an out-and-out young wagabond, your worship,” observed the officer with a grin. “Do you mean to say anything, you young shaver?”

“No,” replied the Dodger, “not here, for this ain’t the shop for justice; besides which, my attorney is a-breakfasting this morning with the Vice President of the House of Commons; but I shall have something to say elsewhere, and so will he, and so will a wery numerous and ’spectable circle of acquaintance as’ll make them beaks wish they’d never been born, or that they’d got their footmen to hang ’em up to their own hat-pegs, ’afore they let ’em come out this morning to try it on upon me. I’ll——”

“There! He’s fully committed!” interposed the clerk. “Take him away.”

“Come on,” said the jailer.

“Oh ah! I’ll come on,” replied the Dodger, brushing his hat with the palm of his hand. “Ah! (to the Bench) it’s no use your looking frightened; I won’t show you no mercy, not a ha’porth of it. *You’ll* pay for this, my fine fellers. I wouldn’t be you for something! I wouldn’t go free, now, if you was to fall down on your knees and ask me. Here, carry me off to prison! Take me away!”

With these last words the Dodger suffered himself to be led off by the collar; threatening, till he got into the yard, to make a parliamentary business of it; and then grinning in the officer’s face, with great glee and self-approval.’

VIII

CHARLEY BATES

Charley Bates, the boon companion of the Artful Dodger as we have already seen, was the only one among the male members of Fagin's gang with a better nature that was aroused by the enormity of the crime of Sikes in the brutal murder of Nancy.

The following scene takes place when Sikes has sought the shelter of the haven at Folly Ditch.

"'Toby," said the boy, falling back, as Sikes turned his eyes towards him, "why didn't you tell me this, down stairs?"

There had been something so tremendous in the shrinking off of the three, that the wretched man was willing to propitiate even this lad. Accordingly he nodded, and made as though he would shake hands with him.

"Let me go into some other room," said the boy, retreating still farther.

"Charley!" said Sikes, stepping forward. "Don't you—don't you know me?"

"Don't come nearer me," answered the boy, still retreating, and looking, with horror in his eyes, upon the murderer's face. "You monster!"

The man stopped half-way, and they looked at each other; but Sikes's eyes sunk gradually to the ground.

"Witness you three," cried the boy, shaking his clenched fist, and becoming more and more excited as he spoke. "Witness you three—I'm not afraid of him—if they come here after him, I'll give him up; I will. I tell you out at once. He may kill me for it if he likes, or if he dares, but if I am here I'll give him up. I'd give him up if he was to be boiled alive. Murder! Help! If there's the pluck of a man among you three, you'll help me. Murder! Help! Down with him!"

Pouring out these cries, and accompanying them with violent gesticulation, the boy actually threw himself, single-handed, upon the strong man, and in the intensity of his energy and the suddenness of his surprise, brought him heavily to the ground.

The three spectators seemed quite stupefied. They offered no interference, and the boy and man rolled on the

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ground together; the former, heedless of the blows that showered upon him, wrenching his hands tighter and tighter in the garments about the murderer's breast, and never ceasing to call for help with all his might.

The contest, however, was too unequal to last long. Sikes had him down, and his knee was on his throat, when Crackit pulled him back with a look of alarm, and pointed to the window. There were lights gleaming below, voices in loud and earnest conversation, the tramp of hurried footsteps—endless they seemed in number—crossing the nearest wooden bridge.'

* * * * *

'Master Charles Bates, appalled by Sikes's crime, fell into a train of reflection whether an honest life was not, after all, the best. Arriving at the conclusion that it certainly was, he turned his back upon the scenes of the past, resolved to amend it in some new sphere of action. He struggled hard and suffered much, for some time; but, having a contented disposition, and a good purpose, succeeded in the end; and, from being a farmer's drudge, and a carrier's lad, he is now the merriest young grazier in all Northamptonshire.'



CHAPTER SEVEN

CARKER, THE MANAGER

I

IN THE OFFICE

JAMES CARKER was the manager of the important city house of Dombey and Son, wholesale, retail and for exportation. Between the cold and unapproachable Mr. Dombey and the common world, as represented by the outer office, Mr. Carker in his own office was the first step, and Mr. Carker as grand vizier inhabited the room that was nearest the Sultan.

‘Mr. Carker was a gentleman thirty-eight or forty years old, of a florid complexion, and with two unbroken rows of glistening teeth, whose regularity and whiteness were quite distressing. It was impossible to escape the observation of them, for he showed them whenever he spoke; and bore so wide a smile upon his countenance (a smile, however, very rarely, indeed, extending beyond his mouth), that there was something in it like the snarl of a cat. He affected a stiff white cravat, after the example of his principal, and was always closely buttoned up and tightly dressed. . . .

The stiffness and nicety of Mr. Carker's dress, and a certain arrogance of manner, either natural to him or imitated from a pattern not far off, gave great additional effect to his humility. He seemed a man who would contend against the power that vanquished him, if he could, but who was utterly borne down by the greatness and superiority of Mr. Dombey. . . .

His manner towards Mr. Dombey was deeply conceived and perfectly expressed. He was familiar with him, in the very extremity of his sense of the distance between them. "Mr. Dombey, to a man in your position from a man in mine, there is no show of subservience compatible with the transaction of business between us, that I should think sufficient. I frankly tell you, Sir, I give it up altogether. I feel that I could not satisfy my own mind; and Heaven knows, Mr. Dombey, you can afford to dispense with the endeavour." If he had carried these words about with him, printed on a placard, and had constantly offered it to Mr. Dombey's perusal on the breast of his coat, he could not have been more explicit than he was. . . .

Mr. Carker the Manager sat at his desk, smooth and soft as usual, reading those letters which were reserved for him to open, backing them occasionally with such memoranda and references as their business purport required, and parcelling them out into little heaps for distribution through the several departments of the House. The post had come in heavy that morning, and Mr. Carker the Manager had a good deal to do.

The general action of a man so engaged—pausing to look over a bundle of papers in his hand, dealing them round in various portions, taking up another bundle and examining its contents with knitted brows and pursed-out lips—dealing, and sorting, and pondering by turns—would easily suggest some whimsical resemblance to a player at cards. The face of Mr. Carker the Manager was in good keeping with such a fancy. It was the face of a man who studied his play, warily: who made himself master of all the strong and weak points of the game: who registered the cards in his mind as they fell about him, knew exactly what was on them, what they missed, and what they made: who was crafty to find out what the other players held, and who never betrayed his own hand. . . .

Something } too deep for a partner, and much too deep
for an adversary, Mr. Carker the Manager sat in the rays

of the sun that came down slanting on him through the skylight, playing his game alone. . . . With hair and whiskers deficient in colour at all times, but feebler than common in the rich sunshine, and more like the coat of a sandy tortoise-shell cat; with long nails, nicely pared and sharpened; with a natural antipathy to any speck of dirt, which made him pause sometimes and watch the falling motes of dust, and rub them off his smooth white hand or glossy linen: Mr. Carker the Manager, sly of manner, sharp of tooth, soft of foot, watchful of eye, oily of tongue, cruel of heart, nice of habit, sat with a dainty steadfastness and patience at his work, as if he were waiting at a mouse's hole.'

II

IN THE HOME

Business confidant and personal friend of Mr. Dombey too was this James Carker, and when Mr. Dombey went into the market to inspect a suitable mate for his second venture in matrimony (which he secretly hoped would be productive of the son and heir so necessary to take the place of the dead Paul as the head of the house of Dombey), it was only natural that Carker should be with him to view the purchase. So we find them together at Leamington, and quick was Carker to fathom the depths of Edith Granger, a young widow, and to see that there was no love in her for his master and that she too possessed the knowledge that she was being bought. The magnetism that Carker exerted over Edith continued into her married life. The temperaments of Mr. Dombey and his wife were so diametrically opposed, that the clash came rather sooner than even Mr. Carker had considered likely; and he was in at the first flash of the flame which he was to help to fan into full fury.

Mr. Dombey had given a dinner party, and Edith had not over-exerted herself to please Mr. Dombey's guests. Mr. Carker was wishing Edith, good night:

"I trust," he said, "that the fatigues of this delightful evening will not inconvenience Mrs. Dombey to-morrow."

"Mrs. Dombey," said Mr. Dombey, advancing, "has sufficiently spared herself fatigue, to relieve you from any anxiety of that kind. I regret to say, Mrs. Dombey, that

I could have wished you had fatigued yourself a little more on this occasion."

She looked at him with a supercilious glance, that it seemed not worth her while to protract, and turned away her eyes without speaking.

"I am sorry, Madam," said Mr. Dombey, "that you should not have thought it your duty—"

She looked at him again.

"Your duty, Madam," pursued Mr. Dombey, "to have received my friends with a little more deference. Some of those whom you have been pleased to slight to-night in a very marked manner, Mrs. Dombey, confer a distinction upon you, I must tell you, in any visit they pay you."

"Do you know that there is some one here?" she returned, now looking at him steadily.

"No! Carker! I beg that you do not. I insist that you do not," cried Mr. Dombey, stopping that noiseless gentleman in his withdrawal. "Mr. Carker, Madam, as you know, possesses my confidence. He is as well acquainted as myself with the subject on which I speak. I beg to tell you, for your information, Mrs. Dombey, that I consider these wealthy and important persons confer a distinction upon *me*:" and Mr. Dombey drew himself up, as having now rendered them of the highest possible importance.

"I ask you," she repeated, bending her disdainful, steady gaze upon him, "do you know that there is some one here, Sir?"

"I must entreat," said Mr. Carker, stepping forward, "I must beg, I must demand, to be released. Slight and unimportant as this difference is—" . . .

"I have pointed out to Mrs. Dombey," said Mr. Dombey, in his most stately manner, "that in her conduct thus early in our married life, to which I object, and which, I request, may be corrected. Carker," with a nod of dismissal, "good night to you!"

Mr. Carker bowed to the imperious form of the Bride, whose sparkling eye was fixed upon her husband.'

* * * * *

Such was the beginning of the breach between Mr. Dombey and his wife.

"Mr. Carker being in my confidence, Mrs. Dombey, may very well be in yours to such an extent. I hope, Mrs.

Dombey," he continued, after a few moments, during which, in his increasing haughtiness, he had improved on his idea, "I may not find it necessary ever to intrust Mr. Carker with any message of objection or remonstrance to you; but as it would be derogatory to my position and reputation to be frequently holding trivial disputes with a lady upon whom I have conferred the highest distinction that it is in my power to bestow, I shall not scruple to avail myself of his services if I see occasion."

The breach was widened by the ties of love that grew up in great strength between Florence, the daughter of the first marriage, and her new mama. Hardly knowing a mother's love, and starved of the natural affection she should have received from her father, who totally ignored her, Florence found a warm friend in Edith Dombey, and she, one on whom she could shower some of that love, that but too seldom found full expression in her.

One of Mr. Dombey's instructions to his wife, through Carker, was:

"Understand then, you *will* make that, if you please—matter of direct objection from me to Mrs. Dombey. You will please to tell her that her show of devotion for my daughter is disagreeable to me. It is likely to be noticed. It is likely to induce people to contrast Mrs. Dombey in her relation towards my daughter, with Mrs. Dombey in her relation towards myself. You will have the goodness to let Mrs. Dombey know plainly that I object to it, and that I expect her to defer immediately to my objection."

III

THE FALLING HOUSE

The house of Dombey was tottering: its master was arrogant: his chief was daily betraying his great trust.

'Among sundry minor alterations in Mr. Carker's life and habits that began to take place at this time, none was more remarkable than the extraordinary diligence with which he applied himself to business, and the closeness with which

he investigated every detail that the affairs of the House laid open to him. Always active and penetrating in such matters, his lynx-eyed vigilance now increased twenty-fold. . . .

The same increased and sharp attention that Mr. Carker bestowed on the business of the House, he applied to his own personal affairs. Though not a partner in the concern—a distinction hitherto reserved solely to inheritors of the great name of Dombey—he was in the receipt of some percentage on its dealings; and, participating in all its facilities for the employment of money to advantage, was considered, by the minnows among the tritons of the East, a rich man. It began to be said, among these shrewd observers, that Jem Carker, of Dombey's, was looking about him to see what he was worth; and that he was calling in his money at a good time, like the long-headed fellow he was; and bets were even offered on the Stock Exchange that Jem was going to marry a rich widow.

Yet these cares did not in the least interfere with Mr. Carker's watching of his chief, or with his cleanness, neatness, sleekness, or any cat-like quality he possessed.'

The climax in the domestic affairs of Mr. Dombey's was reached one night, when Edith, unable to bear her intolerable position, owing to her own intolerance, threw her jewels at her husband's feet and fled from the house.

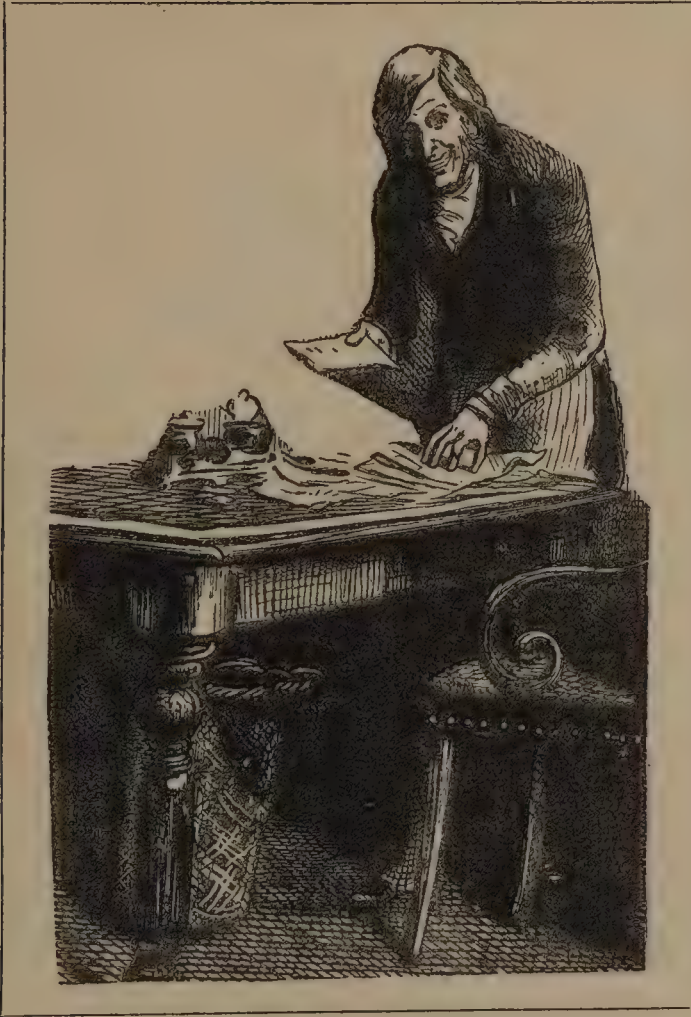
A letter was left to say that she had gone with James Carker!

IV

THE WOMAN SCORNED

There were two women in Carker's case—the one, Edith Dombey with whom he was about to fly to France: the other a mistress of some years before whom he had shamefully deserted: she tells her own story, with a blazing indignation, in these words—

“There was a child called Alice Marwood, born, among poverty and neglect, and nursed in it. Nobody taught her, nobody stepped forward to help her, nobody cared for her.”



“ His lynx-eyed vigilance now increased twenty-fold.”

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“The only care she knew, was to be beaten, and stinted, and abused sometimes. . . .

“There was a girl called Alice Marwood. She was handsome. She was taught too late, and taught all wrong. She was too well cared for, too well trained, too well helped on, too much looked after. . . . What came to that girl comes to thousands every year. It was only ruin, and she was born to it. . . .

“There was a criminal called Alice Marwood—a girl still, but deserted and an outcast. And she was tried, and she was sentenced. And lord, how the gentlemen in the court talked about it! and how grave the judge was on her duty, and on her having perverted the gifts of nature—as if he didn’t know better than anybody there, that they had been made curses to her!—and how he preached about the strong arm of the Law—so very strong to save her, when she was an innocent and helpless little wretch . . . I have thought of that, many times since, to be sure!”

“So Alice Marwood was transported, and was sent to learn her duty, where there was twenty times less duty, and more wickedness, and wrong, and infamy, than here. And Alice Marwood is come back a woman. Such a woman as she ought to be, after all this. . . .”

Through the agency of this Alice, and her mother, “Good Mrs. Brown,” Mr. Dombey learns that Dijon is the destination of his wife and Carker. Somewhat repentant of her part in giving away even so worthless a man, Alice calls on Carker’s sister Harriet, and tells the rest of her story:

“Wretchedness and ruin came on me. I was made a short-lived toy, and flung aside more cruelly and carelessly than even such things are?”

“His usage made a Devil of me. I sunk in wretchedness and ruin, lower and lower yet. I was concerned in a robbery—in every part of it but the gains—and was found out, and sent to be tried, without a friend, without a penny. Though I was but a girl, I would have gone to Death, sooner than ask him for a word, if a word of his could have saved me. I would! . . . But my mother, covetous always, sent to him in my name, told the true story of my case, and humbly prayed and petitioned for a small last gift—for not so many pounds as I have fingers on this hand. Who was it do you think, who snapped his fingers at me in my misery, lying,

as he believed, at his feet, and left me without even this poor sign of remembrance; well satisfied that I should be sent abroad, beyond the reach of further trouble to him, and should die, and rot there? Who was this, do you think?"

"Why do you ask me?" repeated Harriet.

"Why do you tremble?" said Alice, laying her hand upon her arm, and looking in her face, "but that the answer is on your lips: It was your brother James." . . .

"Since then I have seen him! I have followed him with my eyes, in the broad day. If any spark of my resentment slumbered in my bosom, it sprung into a blaze when my eyes rested on him. You know he has wronged a proud man, and made him his deadly enemy!"

She then reveals that to revenge herself on Carker she has given information to Mr. Dombey, as to his place of meeting with Mrs. Dombey, and Mr. Dombey follows the couple to France.

V

CARKER'S HOUR OF TRIUMPH

Having seen that his own coffers were filled at the expense of Mr. Dombey, Carker fled across the channel, and in accordance with an arrangement made with Edith, he met her at a hotel in Dijon. Here the climax of his story is reached and, in the dining room of the hotel's best suite on the first floor, Edith turns on him and spurns him, explaining the revenge she had taken on both her husband and his fawning manager. It is a brilliant dénouement in the skilful telling of a story.

"The sound of Carker's fastening the door. . . . Her hand, for a moment, left the velvet chair to bring a knife within her reach upon the table; then she stood as she had stood before.

"How strange to come here by yourself, my love!" he said as he entered.

"What!" she returned.

Her tone was so harsh; the quick turn of her head so fierce; her attitude so repellent; and her frown so black;

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that he stood with the lamp in his hand, looking at her, as if she had struck him motionless. . . .

Her eyes gleamed strangely on him, but she stood with her hand resting on the chair, and said not a word.

"I have never," resumed Carker, "seen you look so handsome as you do to-night. Even the picture I have carried in my mind during this cruel probation, and which I have contemplated night and day, is exceeded by the reality."

Not a word. Not a look. Her eyes completely hidden by their drooping lashes, but her head held up. . . .

"Sicily shall be the place of our retreat. In the idlest and easiest part of the world, my soul, we'll both seek compensation for old slavery."

He was coming gaily towards her, when, in an instant, she caught the knife up from the table, and started one pace back.

The sudden change in her, the towering fury and intense abhorrence sparkling in her eyes and lighting up her brow, made him stop as if a fire had stopped him.

"Stand still!" she said, "come no nearer me, upon your life!"

They both stood looking at each other. Rage and astonishment were in his face, but he controlled them and said lightly,

"Come, come! Tush, we are alone, and out of everybody's sight and hearing. Do you think to frighten me with these tricks of virtue?"

"Do you think to frighten *me*," she answered fiercely, "from any purpose that I have, and any course I am resolved upon, by reminding me of the solitude of this place, and there being no help near? Me, who am here alone designedly? If I feared you, should I not have avoided you? If I feared you, should I be here, in the dead of night, telling you to your face what I am going to tell? . . . "Don't come near me! Not a step nearer. I tell you, if you do, as Heaven sees us, I shall murder you!"

"Do you mistake me for your husband?" he retorted with a grin.

Disdaining to reply, she stretched her arm out, pointing to the chair. He bit his lip, frowned, laughed, and sat down in it, with a baffled, irresolute, impatient air, he was unable to conceal. . . .

She put the knife down upon the table, and touching her bosom with her hand, said:

"I have something lying here that is no love trinket; and sooner than endure your touch once more, I would use it on you—and you know it, while I speak—with less reluctance than I would on any other creeping thing that lives."

He affected to laugh jestingly, and entreated her to act her play out quickly, for the supper was growing cold. . . .

"How many times," said Edith, bending her darkest glance upon him, "has your bold knavery assailed me with outrage and insult? How many times in your smooth manner, and mocking words and looks, have I been twitted with my courtship and my marriage? How many times have you laid bare my wound of love for that sweet, injured girl, and lacerated it? How often have you fanned the fire on which, for two years, I have writhed; and tempted me to take a desperate revenge, when it has most tortured me?" . . .

"Is that a reason why you have run away with me?" he asked her, tauntingly.

"Yes, and why we are face to face for the last time. Wretch! We meet to-night, and part to-night. For not one moment after I have ceased to speak, will I stay here!"

He turned upon her with his ugliest look, and gripped the table with his hand; but neither rose, nor otherwise answered or threatened her.

"I am a woman," she said, confronting him steadfastly, "who from her very childhood has been shamed and steeled. I have been offered and rejected, put up and appraised, until my very soul has sickened. . . . I stand alone in the world, remembering well what a hollow world it has been to me, and what a hollow part of it I have been myself. You know this, and you know that my fame with it is worthless to me."

"Yes; I imagined that," he said.

"And calculated on it," she rejoined, "and so pursued me. Grown too indifferent for any opposition but indifference, to the daily working of the hands that had moulded me to this; and knowing that my marriage would at least prevent their hawking of me up and down; I suffered myself to be sold as infamously as any woman with a halter round her neck is sold in any market-place. You know that." . . .

Her flashing eyes, uplifted for a moment, lighted again on Carker, and she held some letters out in her left hand.

"See these!" she said, contemptuously. "You have addressed these to me in the false name you go by; one here, some elsewhere on my road. The seals are unbroken. Take them back!"

She crunched them in her hand, and tossed them to his feet. And as she looked upon him now, a smile was on her face.

"We meet and part to-night," she said. "You have fallen on Sicilian days and sensual rest, too soon. You might have cajoled, and fawned, and played your traitor's part, a little longer, and grown richer. You purchase your voluptuous retirement dear!" . . .

He stood before her muttering and menacing, and scowling round as if for something that would help him to conquer her; but with the same indomitable spirit she opposed him, without faltering.

"In every vaunt you make," she said, "I have my triumph. I single out in you the meanest man I know, the parasite and tool of the proud tyrant that his wound may go the deeper and may rankle more. Boast, and revenge me on him! You know how you came here to-night; you know how you stand cowering there; you see yourself in colours quite as despicable, if not as odious, as those in which I see you. Boast then, and revenge me on yourself. . . .

"God's mercy on you, if you try by coming near me!"

"And what," he said, "if there are none of these same boasts and vaunts on my part? What if I were to turn too? Come!" and his teeth fairly shone again. "We must make a treaty of this, or I may take some unexpected course. Sit down, sit down!"

"Too late!" she cried, with eyes that seemed to sparkle fire. "I have thrown my fame and good name to the winds! I have resolved to bear the shame that will attach to me—resolved to know that it attaches falsely—that you know it too—and that he does not, never can, and never shall. I'll die, and make no sign. For this I am here alone with you, at the dead of night. For this I have met you here, in a false name, as your wife. For this, I have been seen here by those men, and left here. Nothing can save you now." . . . "take my warning! Look to yourself!" she said, and smiled again. "You have been betrayed, as all betrayers are. It has been made known that you are in this place, or were to be, or have been. If I live, I saw my husband in a carriage in the street to-night!"

"Strumpet, it's false!" cried Carker.

At the moment, the bell rang loudly in the hall. He turned white, as she held her hand up like an enchantress, at whose invocation the sound had come.

"Hark! do you hear it?"

He set his back against the door; for he saw a change in her, and fancied she was coming on to pass him. But, in a moment, she was gone through the opposite doors communicating with the bed-chamber, and they shut upon her. . . .

All this time, the ringing at the bell was constantly renewed; and those without were beating at the door. . . . There were several voices talking together: at least two of them in English; and though the door was thick, and there was great confusion, he knew one of these too well to doubt whose voice it was. . . .

He was not a coward: but these sounds; what had gone before; the strangeness of the place, which had confused him . . . the frustration of his schemes (for, strange to say, he would have been much bolder if they had succeeded); the unseasonable time; the recollection of having no one near to whom he could appeal for any friendly office; above all, the sudden sense, which made even his heart beat like lead, that the man whose confidence he had outraged, and whom he had so treacherously deceived, was there to recognise and challenge him with his mask plucked off his face; struck a panic through him. He tried the door . . . but couldn't force it. He opened one of the windows, and looked down through the lattice of the blind into the court-yard; but it was a high leap, and the stones were pitiless.

The ringing and knocking still continuing—his panic too—he went back to the door in the bedchamber, and with some new efforts, each more stubborn than the last, wrenched it open. Seeing the little staircase not far off, and feeling the night air coming up, he stole back for his hat and coat, made the door as secure after him as he could, crept down lamp in hand, extinguished it on seeing the street, and having put it in a corner, went out where the stars were shining.'

VI

THE FUGITIVE

“The dread of being hunted in a strange remote place, where the laws might not protect him—” impelled Carker to return to England. If he were compelled to meet Mr. Dombey it was less likely for him to be discovered at home, than abroad. At least that is how he considered the matter; but all his plans frustrated it was difficult to think to any purpose. “He could not separate one subject of reflection from another, sufficiently to dwell upon it, by itself, for a minute at a time. The crash of his project for the gaining of a voluptuous compensation for past restraint; the overthrow of his treachery to one who had been true and generous to him, but whose least proud word and look he had treasured up, at interest for years . . . these were the themes uppermost in his mind. A lurking rage against the woman who had so entrapped him and avenged herself was always there; crude and mis-shapen schemes of retaliation upon her floated in his brain; but nothing was distinct. A hurry and contradiction pervaded all his thoughts.”

He engaged a carriage and postillion to drive him to the coast, and after “a vision of long roads; that stretched away to an horizon, always receding and never gained; of ill-paved towns, up hill and down, where faces came to dark doors and ill-glazed windows, and where rows of mud-bespattered cows and oxen were tied up for sale in the long narrow streets,” arrived at the coast and took steamer to England.

“He had thought of going down into a remote Country-place he knew, and lying quiet there, while he secretly informed himself of what transpired, and determined how to act. He remembered a certain station on the railway, where he would have to branch off to his place of destination, and where there was a quiet Inn. Here, he indistinctly resolved to tarry and rest.”

But tranquillity was not for Carker: the railway track lured him to her ashy bosom; it exerted over him a peculiar fascination: he haunted the station for hours watching for the trains

‘looking curiously at the bridges, signals, lamps, and wondering when another Devil would come by.

A trembling of the ground, and quick vibration in his ears; a distant shriek; a dull light advancing, quickly changed to two red eyes, and a fierce fire, dropping glowing coals; an irresistible bearing on of a great roaring and dilating mass; a high wind, and a rattle—another come and gone, and he holding to a gate, as if to save himself! . . . Ugh! To see the great wheels slowly turning, and to think of being run down and crushed!’

At length, after a restless night, he succeeded in bracing himself up to withstand the fierce attraction of the locomotion, and to betake himself to the “country place.”

But “Death was on him”: he was fated to meet Mr. Dombey for the last time—and this was the manner of it.

‘He paid the money for his journey to the country-place he had thought of; and was walking to and fro, alone, looking along the lines of iron, across the valley in one direction, and towards a dark bridge near at hand in the other; when, turning in his walk, where it was bounded by one end of the wooden stage on which he paced up and down, he saw the man from whom he had fled, emerging from the door by which he himself had entered there. And their eyes met.

In the quick unsteadiness of the surprise, he staggered, and slipped on to the road below him. But recovering his feet immediately, he stepped back a pace or two upon that road, to interpose some wider space between them, and looked at his pursuer, breathing short and quick.

He heard a shout—another—saw the face change from its vindictive passion to a faint sickness and terror—felt the earth tremble—knew in a moment that the rush was come—uttered a shriek—looked round—saw the red eyes, bleared and dim, in the daylight, close upon him—was beaten down, caught up, and whirled away upon a jagged mill, that spun him round and round, and struck him limb from limb, and licked his stream of life up with its fiery heat, and cast his mutilated fragments in the air.

When the traveller, who had been recognised, recovered from a swoon, he saw them bringing from a distance something covered, that lay heavy and still, upon a board, between four men, and saw that others drove some dogs away that sniffed upon the road, and soaked his blood up, with a train of ashes.’

VII

THE TRUST HE ABUSED

Thus ended the craven fawning Carker, pursued to his death by the man he had doubly betrayed. Of his machinations that resulted in the fall of the House of Dombey. In the words of one of the confidential heads of the firm:

“He has abused his trust in many ways, he has oftener dealt and speculated to advantage for himself, than for the House he represented; he has led the House on, to prodigious ventures, often resulting in enormous losses; he has always pampered the vanity and ambition of his employer, when it was his duty to have held them in check. . . . Undertakings have been entered on, to swell the reputation of the House for vast resources, and to exhibit it in magnificent contrast to other merchants’ houses, of which it requires a steady head to contemplate the possibly—a few disastrous changes of affairs might render them the probably—ruinous consequences. In the midst of the many transactions of the House, in most parts of the world: a great labyrinth of which only he has held the clue: he has had the opportunity, and he seems to have used it, of keeping the various results afloat, when ascertained, and substituting estimates and generalities for facts. Latterly, he appears to have devoted the greatest pains to making these results so plain and clear, that reference to the private books enables one to grasp them, numerous and varying as they are, with extraordinary ease. As if he had resolved to show his employer at one broad view what has been brought upon him by ministration to his ruling passion! That it has been his constant practice to minister to that passion basely, and to flatter it corruptly, is indubitable. In that, his criminality, as it is connected with the affairs of the House, chiefly consists.”



CHAPTER EIGHT

KINGS OF THE ROAD

I

TRAMPS ON THE DOVER ROAD

As befitted a lover of the highway, and a prodigious tramp himself, Dickens had an almost perfect understanding of the Tramp and a remarkable insight into their devious ways. His sympathy with these veritable kings of the road was never better exemplified than in one of the *Uncommercial Traveller* papers contributed to *Household Words*, depicting the scene outside his house at Gads Hill on the Dover Road.

‘I have my eye upon a piece of Kentish road, bordered on either side by a wood, and having on one hand, between the road-dust and the trees, a skirting patch of grass. Wild flowers grow in abundance on this spot, and it lies high and airy, with a distant river stealing steadily away to the ocean, like a man’s life. To gain the milestone here, which the moss, primroses, violets, blue-bells, and wild roses, would soon render illegible but for peering travellers pushing them

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aside with their sticks, you must come up a steep hill, come which way you may. So, all the tramps with carts or caravans—the Gipsy-tramp, the Show-tramp, the Cheap Jack—find it impossible to resist the temptations of the place, and all turn the horse loose when they come to it, and boil the pot. Bless the place, I love the ashes of the vagabond fires that have scorched its grass! What tramp children do I see here, attired in a handful of rags, making a gymnasium of the shafts of the cart, making a feather-bed of the flints and brambles, making a toy of the hobbled old horse who is not much more like a horse than any cheap toy would be! Here, do I encounter the cart of mats and brooms and baskets—with all thoughts of business given to the evening wind—with the stew made and being served out—with Cheap Jack and Dear Jill striking soft music out of the plates that are rattled like warlike cymbals when put up for auction at fairs and markets—their minds so influenced (no doubt) by the melody of the nightingales as they begin to sing in the woods behind them, that if I were to propose to deal, they would sell me anything at cost price. On this hallowed ground has it been my happy privilege (let me whisper it), to behold the White-haired Lady with the pink eyes, eating meat-pie with the Giant: while, by the hedge-side, on the box of blankets which I knew contained the snakes, were set forth the cups and saucers and the teapot. It was on an evening in August, that I chanced upon this ravishing spectacle, and I noticed that, whereas the Giant reclined half concealed beneath the overhanging boughs and seemed indifferent to Nature, the white hair of the gracious Lady streamed free in the breath of evening, and her pink eyes found pleasure in the landscape. I heard only a single sentence of her uttering, yet it bespoke a talent for modest repartee. The ill-mannered Giant—accursed be his evil race!—had interrupted the Lady in some remark, and, as I passed that enchanted corner of the wood, she gently reproved him, with the words, “Now, Cobby”;—Cobby! so short a name!—“ain’t one fool enough to talk at a time?”

Within appropriate distance of this magic ground, though not so near it as that the song trolled from tap or bench at door can invade its woodland silence, is a little hostelry which no man possessed of a penny was ever known to pass in warm weather. Before its entrance are certain pleasant trimmed limes; likewise a cool well, with so musical a bucket-handle that its fall upon the bucket rim will make a horse

prick up his ears and neigh, upon the drougthy road half a mile off. This is a house of great resort for hay-making tramps and harvest tramps, insomuch that as they sit within, drinking their mugs of beer, their relinquished scythes and reaping-hooks glare out of the open windows, as if the whole establishment were a family war-coach of Ancient Britons.'

On the self-same Dover Road, little David Copperfield, on his vagabondish tramp to his aunt's at Dover, met with a rather disagreeable adventure with the tinker tramp.

'The trampers were worse than ever that day, and inspired me with a dread that is yet quite fresh in my mind. Some of them were most ferocious-looking ruffians, who stared at me as I went by; and stopped, perhaps, and called after me to come back and speak to them, and when I took to my heels, stoned me. I recollect one young fellow—a tinker, I suppose, from his wallet and brazier—who had a woman with him, and who faced about and stared at me thus; and then roared at me in such a tremendous voice to come back, that I halted and looked round.

"Come here, when you're called," said the tinker, "or I'll rip your young body open."

I thought it best to go back. As I drew nearer to them, trying to propitiate the tinker by my looks, I observed that the woman had a black eye.

"Where are you going?" said the tinker, gripping the bosom of my shirt with his blackened hand.

"I am going to Dover," I said.

"Where do you come from?" asked the tinker, giving his hand another turn in my shirt, to hold me more securely.

"I come from London," I said.

"What lay are you upon?" asked the tinker. "Are you a prig?"

"N—no," I said.

"Ain't you, by G—? If you make a brag of your honesty to me," said the tinker, "I'll knock your brains out."

With his disengaged hand he made a menace of striking me, and then looked at me from head to foot.

"Have you got the price of a pint of beer about you?" said the tinker. "If you have, out with it, afore I take it away!"

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I should certainly have produced it, but that I met the woman's look, and saw her very slightly shake her head, and form "No!" with her lips.

"I am very poor," I said, attempting to smile, "and have got no money."

"Why, what do you mean?" said the tinker, looking so sternly at me, that I almost feared he saw the money in my pocket.

"Sir!" I stammered.

"What do you mean," said the tinker, "by wearing my brother's silk handkercher? Give it over here!" And he had mine off my neck in a moment, and tossed it to the woman.

The woman burst into a fit of laughter, as if she thought this a joke, and tossed it back to me, nodded once, as slightly as before, and made the word "Go!" with her lips. Before I could obey, however, the tinker seized the handkerchief out of my hand with a roughness that threw me away like a feather, and putting it loosely round his own neck, turned upon the woman with an oath, and knocked her down. I never shall forget seeing her fall backward on the hard road, and lie there with her bonnet tumbled off, and her hair all whitened in the dust; nor, when I looked back from a distance, seeing her sitting on the pathway, which was a bank by the roadside, wiping the blood from her face with a corner of her shawl, while he went on ahead.'

II

OTHER TRAMPS

The numerous fraternity of Tramps, says Dickens, comes so vividly before his mind's eye, that a compulsion was upon him to make notes of the Tramps he perceived on summer roads in all directions. These are his observations:

'Whenever a tramp sits down to rest by the wayside, he sits with his legs in a dry ditch; and whenever he goes to sleep (which is very often indeed), he goes to sleep on his back. Yonder, by the high road, glaring white in the bright sunshine, lies, on the dusty bit of turf under the bramble-bush that fences the coppice from the highway, the tramp of the order savage, fast asleep. He lies on the broad of his



The tinker tramp

back, with his face turned up to the sky, and one of his ragged arms loosely thrown across his face. His bundle . . . is thrown down beside him, and the waking woman with him sits with her legs in the ditch, and her back to the road . . . You can seldom catch sight of her, resting thus, without seeing her in a despondently defiant manner doing something to her hair or her bonnet, and glancing at you between her fingers. She does not often go to sleep herself in the daytime, but will sit for any length of time beside the man. And his slumberous propensities would not seem to be referable to the fatigue of carrying the bundle, for she carries it much oftener and further than he. When they are afoot, you will mostly find him slouching on ahead, in a gruff temper, while she lags heavily behind with the burden. He is given to personally correcting her, too—which phase of his character develops itself oftenest, on benches outside alehouse doors—and she appears to become strongly attached to him for these reasons; it may usually be noticed that when the poor creature has a bruised face, she is the most affectionate. He has no occupation whatever, this order of tramp, and has no object whatever in going anywhere. He will sometimes call himself a brick-maker, or a sawyer, but only when he takes an imaginative flight. He generally represents himself, in a vague way, as looking out for a job of work; but he never did work, he never does and he never will. It is a favourite fiction with him, however (as if he were the most industrious character on earth), that *you* never work; and as he goes past your garden and sees you looking at your flowers, you will overhear him growl with a strong sense of contrast, “*You* are a lucky hidle devil, *you* are!”

The slinking tramp is of the same hopeless order, and has the same injured conviction on him that you were born to whatever you possess, and never did anything to get it.’

* * * * *

‘But the most vicious, by far, of all the idle tramps, is the tramp who pretends to have been a gentleman. “Educated,” he writes, from the village beer-shop in pale ink of a ferruginous complexion; “educated at Trin. Coll. Cam.—nursed in the lap of affluence—once in my small way the patron of the Muses,” etc. etc. etc.—surely a sympathetic mind will not withhold a trifle, to help him on to the market-town where he thinks of giving a Lecture to the *fruges consumere nati*, on things in general? This shameful creature lolling

about hedge tap-rooms in his ragged clothes, now so far from being black that they looked as if they never can have been black, is more selfish and insolent than even the savage tramp. He would sponge on the poorest boy for a farthing, and spurn him when he had got it; he would interpose (if he could get anything by it) between the baby and the mother's breast. . . .

The young fellows who trudge along barefoot, five or six together, their boots slung over their shoulders, their shabby bundles under their arms, their sticks newly cut from some roadside wood, are not eminently prepossessing, but are much less objectionable. There is a tramp-fellowship among them. They pick one another up at resting stations, and go on in companies. They always go at a fast swing—though they generally limp too—and there is invariably one of the company who has much ado to keep up with the rest. They generally talk about horses, and any other means of locomotion than walking.'

Tramp handicraft men—fast disappearing in these strictly utilitarian days—also come within the scope of these kings of the road: the tinker, knife grinder and umbrella repairer, grinding their way through the lovely English country.

'Very agreeable, too, to go on a chair-mending tour. What judges we should be of rushes, and how knowingly (with a sheaf and a bottomless chair at our back) we should lounge on bridges, looking over at osier-beds! Among all the innumerable occupations that cannot possibly be transacted without the assistance of lookers-on, chair-mending may take a station in the first rank. When we sat down with our backs against the barn or the public-house, and began to mend, what a sense of popularity would grow upon us! When all the children came to look at us, and the tailor, and the general dealer, and the farmer who had been giving a small order at the little saddler's, and the groom from the great house, and the publican, and even the two skittle-players (and here note that, howsoever busy all the rest of village human-kind may be, there will always be two people with leisure to play at skittles, wherever village skittles are), what encouragement would be on us to plait and weave. No one looks at us while we plait and weave these words. Clock-mending again. Except for the slight inconvenience of carrying a clock under our arm, and the monotony of

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making the bell go, whenever we came to a human habitation, what a pleasant privilege to give a voice to the dumb cottage-clock, and set it talking to the cottage family again. Likewise we foresee great interest in going round by the park plantations, under the overhanging boughs (hares, rabbits, partridges, and pheasants, scudding like mad across and across the chequered ground before us), and so over the park ladder, and through the wood, until we came to the Keeper's lodge. Then, would the Keeper be discoverable at his door, in a deep nest of leaves, smoking his pipe. Then, on our accosting him in the way of our trade, would he call to Mrs. Keeper, respecting "t'ould clock" in the kitchen. Then, would Mrs. Keeper ask us into the lodge, and on due examination we should offer to make a good job of it for eighteenpence; which offer, being accepted, would set us tinkling and clinking among the chubby awe-struck little Keepers for an hour and more. So completely to the family's satisfaction would we achieve our work, that the Keeper would mention how that there was something wrong with the bell of the turret stable-clock up at the Hall, and that if we thought good of going up to the housekeeper on the chance of that job too, why he would take us.'

III

PUNCH AND JUDY

Dickens had a particular leaning towards the strolling player, and with some of the beloved vagabonds of this class we have already been concerned. There are a couple of vagabonds, none the less beloved, who have not been included amongst the types there dealt with. Being veritable kings of the road, they are better included in this section. I refer of course to the immortal Codlin and Short, promoters of the no less immortal Punch and Judy.

Little Nell and her grandfather encountered them in a churchyard between Hampstead and Banbury (probably at Aylesbury) on the second day of their long journey afoot; "seated in easy attitudes upon the grass, and so busily engaged as to be at first unconscious of intruders. It was not difficult to divine that they were of a class of itinerant showmen—exhibitors of the freaks of Punch—for, perched cross-legged upon a tombstone behind them, was a figure of that hero

himself, his nose and chin as hooked and his face as beaming as usual.

‘In part scattered upon the ground at the feet of the two men, and in part jumbled together in a long flat box, were the other persons of the Drama. The hero’s wife and one child, the hobby-horse, the doctor, the foreign gentleman, . . . the executioner, and the devil, were all here. Their owners had evidently come to that spot to make some needful repairs in the stage arrangements, for one of them was engaged in binding together a small gallows with thread, while the other was intent upon fixing a new black wig, with the aid of a small hammer and some tacks, upon the head of the radical neighbour, who had been beaten bald. . . .

One of them, the actual exhibitor no doubt, was a little merry-faced man with a twinkling eye and a red nose, who seemed to have unconsciously imbibed something of his hero’s character. The other—that was he who took the money—had rather a careful and cautious look, which was perhaps inseparable from his occupation also. . . .

The real name of the little man was Harris, but it had gradually merged into the less euphonious one of Trotters, which, with the prefatory adjective, Short, had been conferred upon him by reason of the small size of his legs. Short Trotters, however, being a compound name, inconvenient of use in friendly dialogue, the gentleman on whom it had been bestowed was known among his intimates either as “Short,” or “Trotters,” and was seldom accosted at full length as Short Trotters, except in formal conversations and on occasions of ceremony.’

IV

ON THE TRAMP WITH PUNCH AND JUDY

Little Nell helped them by repairing the dresses of the figures, and with them went to the inn near-by to spend the night, where Codlin and Short gave a show of Punch in an empty stable. Next day, all four went together along the road to the town where the races were to be held.

‘And here Mr. Codlin’s false position in society and the effect it wrought upon his wounded spirit, were strongly illustrated; for whereas he had been last night accosted

by Mr. Punch as "master," and had by inference left the audience to understand that he maintained that individual for his own luxurious entertainment and delight, here he was, now, painfully walking beneath the burden of that same Punch's temple, and bearing it bodily upon his shoulders on a sultry day and along a dusty road. . . .

Mr. Codlin trudged heavily on, exchanging a word or two at intervals with Short, and stopping to rest and growl occasionally. Short led the way; with the flat box, the private luggage (which was not extensive) tied up in a bundle, and a brazen trumpet slung from his shoulder-blade. . . .

When they came to any town or village, or even to a detached house of good appearance, Short blew a blast upon the brazen trumpet and carolled a fragment of a song in that hilarious tone common to Punches and their consorts. If people hurried to the windows, Mr. Codlin pitched the temple, and hastily unfurling the drapery and concealing Short therewith, flourished hysterically on the pipes and performed an air. Then the entertainment began as soon as might be; Mr. Codlin having the responsibility of deciding on its length and of protracting or expediting the time for the hero's final triumph over the enemy of mankind, according as he judged that the after-crop of halfpence would be plentiful or scant. When it had been gathered in to the last farthing, he resumed his load and on they went again.

Sometimes they played out the toll across a bridge or ferry, and once exhibited by particular desire at a turn-pike, where the collector, being drunk in his solitude, paid down a shilling to have it to himself. . . . They were generally well received, and seldom left a town without a troop of ragged children shouting at their heels.'

Feeling sure that the old man has stolen the child and is endeavouring to elude his pursuers, both Codlin and Short resolve to keep an eye on them until they are able to give them over to the proper authorities in exchange for a reward they feel sure will be offered.

"He has given his friends the slip," said Short, "and persuaded this delicate young creetur all along of her fondness for him to be his guide and travelling companion—where to, he knows no more than the man in the moon. . . .

"I am not a going to see this fair young child a falling

into bad hands, and getting among people that she’s no more fit for, than they are to get among angels as their ordinary chums. Therefore when they dewelope an intention of parting company from us, I shall take measures for detaining of ’em, and restoring ’em to their friends.” . . .

“Short,” said Mr. Codlin, “it’s possible that there may be uncommon good sense in what you’ve said. If there is, and there should be a reward, Short, remember that we’re partners in everything!”’

V

CODLIN’S THE FRIEND

Very anxious, however, that if there should be any reward it shall come to him alone, Codlin endeavours to make himself particularly agreeable to Little Nell, so the next day

‘They had not gone very far, when the child was again struck by the altered behaviour of Mr. Thomas Codlin, who instead of plodding on sulkily by himself as he had heretofore done, kept close to her, and when he had an opportunity of looking at her unseen by his companion, warned her by certain wry faces and jerks of the head not to put any trust in Short, but to reserve all confidences for Codlin. Neither did he confine himself to looks and gestures, for when she and her grandfather were walking on beside the aforesaid Short, and that little man was talking with his accustomed cheerfulness on a variety of indifferent subjects, Thomas Codlin testified his jealousy and distrust by following close at her heels, and occasionally admonishing her ankles with the legs of the theatre in a very abrupt and painful manner.’

Eventually he delivered himself of the famous dictum:

“Recollect the friend. Codlin’s the friend, not Short. Short’s very well as far as he goes, but the real friend is Codlin—not Short.”

To which he added the advice—

“As long as you travel with us, keep as near me as you can. Don’t offer to leave us—not on any account—but always stick to me and say that I’m your friend. Will you

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bear that in mind, my dear, and always say that it was me that was your friend?"

The persistent attentions of these two men were their own undoing; they made Little Nell realise that the future of her grandfather was not safe, and she prevailed upon him to fly with her when the opportunity occurred during the noise and bustle of the races.

And so we lose sight of Codlin and Short for a very considerable period until at last, in course of their journeys they arrive in London, and set their show in the vicinity of Bevis Marks. Near by, at the house of the rascally lawyer, Sampson Brass, there lodged a strange "single gentleman" (none other than the brother of Little Nell's grandfather) who had a strong predilection for Punches, and would entertain all and sundry at his lodgings in his endeavour to trace the whereabouts of his brother, knowing such men to be the most likely persons to have news of the fugitives: and to his room were Codlin and Short invited accordingly.

"You're pretty well browned by the sun, both of you," said their entertainer. "Have you been travelling?"

Mr. Short replied in the affirmative with a nod and a smile. Mr. Codlin added a corroborative nod and a short groan, as if he still felt the weight of the Temple on his shoulders.

"To fairs, markets, races, and so forth, I suppose?" pursued the single gentleman.

"Yes, Sir," returned Short, "pretty nigh all over the West of England."

"I have talked to men of your craft from North, East, and South," returned their host, in rather a hasty manner; "but I never lighted on any from the West before."

"It's our reg'lar summer circuit is the West, master," said Short; "that's where it is. We takes the East of London in the spring and winter, and the West of England in the summer-time. Many's the hard day's walking in rain and mud, and with never a penny earned, we've had down in the West."

Then they disclosed how in the course of their journeys they had met an old man and a young child, at which information the old man's brother became quite excited.

"Did I always say, Thomas," cried Short, turning with

a look of amazement to his friend, "that there was sure to be an inquiry after them two travellers?"

"*You* said!" returned Mr. Codlin. "Did I always say that that 'ere blessed child was the most interesting I ever see? Did I always say I loved her, and doated on her? Pretty creetur, I think I hear her now. 'Codlin's my friend,' she says, with a tear of gratitude a trickling down her little eye: 'Codlin's my friend,' she says—'not Short. Short's very well,' she says; 'I've no quarrel with Short; he means kind, I dare say; but Codlin,' she says, 'has the feelings for *my* money, though he mayn't look it.'"

They were not really bad men, but naturally wanted to make the best possible impression on this newly-found patron: although they had lost sight of the wandering couple, they knew of Nell's occupation with Mrs. Jarley; here was the clue for which the "single gentleman" had been searching so long.

"Here's a sovereign a-piece. If I can find these people through your means, it is but a prelude to twenty more."

Nell and her grandfather were of course found through the agency of Codlin and Short—and their services were not forgotten!

VI

GRINDER'S LOT

Typical of other honest hard-working vagabonds of the road are the show folk encountered by Little Nell and her grandfather on their long tramp through the Midlands.

"Grinder's Lot," as the Punch and Judy show men called them, are thus described:

'Mr. Grinder's company, familiarly termed a lot, consisted of a young gentleman and a young lady on stilts, and Mr. Grinder himself, who used his natural legs for pedestrian purposes and carried at his back a drum. The public costume of the young people was of the Highland kind, but the night being damp and cold, the young gentleman wore over his kilt a man's pea jacket reaching to his ankles, and a glazed hat; the young lady too was muffled in an old cloth



pelisse and had a handkerchief tied about her head. Their Scotch bonnets, ornamented with plumes of jet black feathers, Mr. Grinder carried on his instrument.

"Bound for the races, I see," said Grinder, coming up out of breath. "So are we. How are you, Short?" With that they shook hands in a very friendly manner. The young people being too high up for the ordinary salutations, saluted Short after their own fashion. The young gentleman twisted up his right stilt and patted him on the shoulder, and the young lady rattled her tambourine.

"Practice?" said Short, pointing to the stilts.

"No," returned Grinder. "It comes either to walkin' in 'em or carryin' of 'em, and they like walkin' in 'em best. It's wery pleasant for the prospects. Which road are you takin'? We go the nighest."

Which was not unnatural, especially on stilts!

VII

COMPANY AT THE JOLLY SANDBOYS

However, Codlin and Short stopped the night at the Jolly Sandboys, where others of their craft were also encountered, the vanguard being a company of gaudily-dressed dogs who greeted them standing "on their hind legs in a grave and melancholy row".

'There the dogs stood, patiently winking and gaping and looking extremely hard at the boiling pot, until Jerry himself appeared, when they all dropped down at once and walked about the room in their natural manner. This posture it must be confessed did not much improve their appearance, as their own personal tails and their coat tails—both capital things in their way—did not agree together.

Jerry, the manager of these dancing dogs, was a tall black-whiskered man in a velveteen coat, who seemed well known to the landlord and his guests and accosted them with great cordiality. Disencumbering himself of a barrel organ which he placed upon a chair, and retaining in his hand a small whip wherewith to awe his company of comedians, he came up to the fire to dry himself, and entered into conversation. . . .

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Supper was not yet over, when there arrived at the Jolly Sandboys two more travellers bound for the same haven as the rest, who had been walking in the rain for some hours, and came in shining and heavy with water. One of these was the proprietor of a giant, and a little lady without legs or arms, who had jogged forward in a van; the other, a silent gentleman who earned his living by showing tricks upon the cards, and who had rather deranged the natural expression of his countenance by putting small leaden lozenges into his eyes and bringing them out at his mouth, which was one of his professional accomplishments. The name of the first of these new-comers was Vuffin; the other, probably, as a pleasant satire upon his ugliness, was called Sweet William.'

Then some of the secrets of the Showman's business were disclosed by Mr. Vuffin. "The Giant," he told an inquirer, was "going at the knees. Once get a giant shaky on his legs, and the public care no more about him than they do for a dead cabbage-stalk."

"What becomes of the old giants?" was a question that naturally arose.

"They're usually kept in caravans to wait upon the dwarfs," said Mr. Vuffin. . . .

"It's better that, than letting 'em go upon the parish or about the streets," said Mr. Vuffin. "Once make a giant common and giants will never draw again. Look at wooden legs. If there was only one man with a wooden leg what a property *he'd* be!"

"Instead of which," pursued Mr. Vuffin, "if you was to advertise Shakespeare played entirely by wooden legs, it's my belief you wouldn't draw a sixpence."

"This shows, you see," said Mr. Vuffin, waving his pipe with an argumentative air, "this shows the policy of keeping the used-up giants still in the caravans, where they get food and lodging for nothing, all their lives, and in general very glad they are to stop there. There was one giant—a black 'un—as left his caravan some years ago and took to carrying coach-bills about London, making himself as cheap as crossing-sweepers. He died. I make no insinuation against anybody in particular," said Mr. Vuffin, looking solemnly round, "but he was ruining the trade;—and he died."

The landlord drew his breath hard, and looked at the

owner of the dogs, who nodded and said gruffly that *he* remembered.

“I know you do, Jerry,” said Mr. Vuffin with profound meaning. “I know you remember it, Jerry, and the universal opinion was, that it served him right. Why, I remember the time when old Maunders as had three-and-twenty wans—I remember the time when old Maunders had in his cottage in Spa Fields in the winter-time, when the season was over, eight male and female dwarfs setting down to dinner every day, who was waited on by eight old giants in green coats, red smalls, blue cotton stockings, and high-lows: and there was one dwarf as had grown elderly and wicious who whenever his giant wasn’t quick enough to please him, used to stick pins in his legs, not being able to reach up any higher. I know that’s a fact, for Maunders told it me himself.”

“What about the dwarfs when *they* get old?” inquired the landlord.

“The older a dwarf is, the better worth he is,” returned Mr. Vuffin; “a grey-headed dwarf, well wrinkled, is beyond all suspicion. But a giant weak in the legs and not standing upright!—keep him in the carawan, but never show him, never show him, for any persuasion that can be offered.”



CHAPTER NINE

THE GREATEST SCOUNDREL OF THEM ALL

I

JONAS CHUZZLEWIT

THE greatest scoundrel in the picture gallery of Dickens's varied assortment of rogues and vagabonds was, without a doubt, Jonas Chuzzlewit. Bill Sikes was a mere callous brute, a product of the uneducated masses of the early nineteenth century; Uriah Heep, Carker, Merdle, Rokesmith, Quilp, knaves all; these stopped short of murder; one can find, or invent, some mitigating circumstances in an honourable attempt to exonerate Bradley Headstone; but what ray of light and hope is there to illumine the cool, calculating, crafty life and deeds of this member of the Chuzzlewit family?

With his usual humanity Dickens certainly attempts excuses on behalf of Jonas Chuzzlewit for, in his first description of him, he says:

'The education of Mr. Jonas had been conducted from his cradle on the strictest principles of the main chance.

The very first word he learnt to spell was "gain," and the second (when he got into two syllables), "money." But for two results, which were not clearly foreseen perhaps by his watchful parent in the beginning, his training may be said to have been unexceptionable. One of these flaws was, that having been long taught by his father to over-reach everybody, he had imperceptibly acquired a love of over-reaching that venerable monitor himself. The other, that from his early habits of considering everything as a question of property, he had gradually come to look, with impatience, on his parent as a certain amount of personal estate, which had no right whatever to be going at large, but ought to be secured in that particular description of iron safe which is commonly called a coffin, and banked in the grave.'

II

HIS FIRST CRIME

The first crime recorded against Jonas is his attempt to poison his old father in order to inherit his money all the quicker. Such was the belief in his own infallibility, Jonas thought he really was the cause of his father's death; but as the old clerk Chuffey revealed after Jonas was apprehended for a crime he actually had committed (the murder of Montague Tigg), Jonas was deceived; his father discovered his son's intentions, frustrated them, and died quite naturally.

"He bought the stuff," said Chuffey, stretching out his arm towards Jonas, while an unwonted fire shone in his eye, and lightened up his face; "he bought the stuff, . . . and brought it home. He mixed the stuff—look at him!—with some sweetmeat in a jar, exactly as the medicine for his father's cough was mixed, and put it in a drawer; in that drawer yonder in the desk; he knows which drawer I mean! He kept it there locked up. But his courage failed him, or his heart was touched—my God! I hope it was his heart! He was his only son!—and he did not put it in the usual place, where my old master would have taken it twenty times a-day." . . .

"He put it in that drawer. . . . He went so often there, and was so secret, that his father took notice of it; and

when he was out, had it opened. We were there together and we found the mixture—Mr. Chuzzlewit and I. He took it into his possession, and made light of it at the time; but in the night he came to my bedside, weeping, and told me that his own son had it in his mind to poison him. ‘Oh, Chuff,’ he said, ‘oh, dear old Chuff! a voice came into my room to-night, and told me that this crime began with me. It began when I taught him to be too covetous of what I have to leave, and made the expectation of it his great business!’ Those were his words; ay, they are his very words! If he was a hard man now and then, it was for his only son. He loved his only son, and he was always good to me!”

“‘He shall not weary for my death, Chuff:’ that was what he said next, . . . crying like a little child: ‘He shall not weary for my death, Chuff. He shall have it now; . . . I always loved him; perhaps he’ll love *me* then. It’s a dreadful thing to have my own child thirsting for my death. But I might have known it. I have sown, and I must reap. He shall believe that I am taking this. . . .

“My dear old master made believe next day that he had opened the drawer by mistake . . . and that he had been surprised to find his fresh supply of cough medicine in such a place, but supposed it had been put there in a hurry when the drawer stood open. We burnt it; but his son believed that he was taking it—he knows he did. Once Mr. Chuzzlewit to try him took heart to say it had a strange taste; and he got up directly, and went out.” . . .

He sank and altered from that time . . . and never held up his head again. It was only a few days . . . “Spare him, Chuff,” he said before he died. “Spare him, Chuff.” I promised him I would. I’ve tried to do it. He’s his only son.”’

III

INTO THE TOILS OF MONTAGUE TIGG

The Anglo-Bengalee Loan and Disinterested Life Insurance Company was a mushroom swindling concern, at the head of which was one Montague Tigg, whom Jonas had known in earlier days as a shabby tout for Chevy Slyme, a distant connection of the Chuzzlewit family.

To the palatial offices of the company came Jonas, with the object of effecting an insurance (and no questions asked) on the life of his newly-wed wife, without her knowledge, "one never knows what may happen to these women, so I'm thinking of insuring her life. It is but fair, you know, that a man should secure some consolation in case of meeting with such a loss."

At first Jonas did not recognise in Tigg Montague, with his fine clothes, and finely furnished office, the out-at-elbow, down-at-heel, half-a-crown-borrowing Montague Tigg of former days. But mutual recognition quickly followed, and Tigg, ever with his eye on the main chance, set about to impress Jonas with a show of success and wealth.

"Why don't you take premiums instead of paying 'em," he whispered in Jonas's ear. "That's what a man like you should do. Join us! . . ."

"If men like you and I speak openly at first, all possible misunderstanding is avoided. Why should I disguise what you know so well, but what the crowd never dream of? We companies are all birds of prey: mere birds of prey. The question is, whether, in serving our own turn, we can serve yours too; whether in double-lining our own nest, we can put a single lining into yours. Oh, you're in our secret. You're behind the scenes. We'll make a merit of dealing plainly with you, when we know we can't help it."

It was remarked, on the first introduction of Mr. Jonas into these pages, that there is a simplicity of cunning no less than a simplicity of innocence, and that in all matters involving a faith in knavery, he was the most credulous of men. If Mr. Tigg had preferred any claim to high and honourable dealing, Jonas would have suspected him though he had been a very model of probity; but when he gave utterance to Jonas's own thoughts of everything and everybody, Jonas began to feel that he was a pleasant fellow, and one to be talked to freely.'

So into the toils of Tigg and Crimple—much more expert rogues than he, Jonas walked with open eyes, and greedy passion.

'They solicited the honour of Jonas's better acquaintance; trusted that they would have the pleasure of introducing

him into that elevated society in which he was so well qualified to shine; and informed him, in the most friendly manner, that the advantages of their respective establishments were entirely at his control. In a word, they said "Be one of us!" And Jonas said he was infinitely obliged to them, and he would be: adding within himself, that so long as they "stood treat," there was nothing he would like better.'

IV

JONAS COMES HOME

One of these treats at other people's expense—for their own sordid ends—resulted in Jonas being carried home by Tigg Montague's factotum, Bailey Junior, in a state of intoxication.

"Don't be frightened," said Bailey. "There ain't nothing the matter. I've brought home Mr. Chuzzlewit. He ain't ill. He's only a little swipecy, you know." Mr. Bailey reeled in his boots, to express intoxication. . . . "Don't you come out, a-catching cold in your head. I'll wake him!" Mr. Bailey . . . opened the coach door, let down the steps, and giving Jonas a shake, cried, "We've got home, my flower! Tumble up, then!"

He was so far recovered as to be able to respond to this appeal, and to come stumbling out of the coach in a heap, to the great hazard of Mr. Bailey's person. When he got upon the pavement, Mr. Bailey first butted at him in front, and then dexterously propped him up behind; and having steadied him by these means, he assisted him into the house.

"You go up first with the light," said Bailey to Mrs. Jonas, "and we'll foller. Don't tremble so. He won't hurt you. When I've had a drop too much, I'm full of good natur myself."

She went on before; and her husband and Bailey, by dint of tumbling over each other, and knocking themselves about, got at last into the sitting-room above stairs, where Jonas staggered into a seat.

"There!" said Mr. Bailey. "He's all right now. You ain't got nothing to cry for, bless you! He's righter than a trivet!"

The ill-favoured brute, with dress awry, and sodden face, and rumpled hair, sat blinking and drooping, and rolling his idiotic eyes about, until, becoming conscious by degrees, he recognised his wife, and shook his fist at her.

"Ah!" cried Mr. Bailey, squaring his arms with a sudden emotion. "What, you're wicious, are you? Would you though! You'd better not!"

"Pray, go away!" said Merry. "Bailey, my good boy, go home. Jonas!" she said; timidly laying her hand upon his shoulder, and bending her head down, over him; "Jonas!"

"Look at her!" cried Jonas, pushing her off with his extended arm. "Look here! Look at her! Here's a bargain for a man!"

"Dear Jonas!"

"Dear Devil!" he replied, with a fierce gesture. "You're a pretty clog to be tied to a man for life, you mewling, white-faced cat! Get out of my sight!"

"I know you don't mean it, Jonas. You wouldn't say it if you were sober."

With affected gaiety she gave Bailey a piece of money, and again implored him to be gone. Her entreaty was so earnest, that the boy had not the heart to stay there. But he stopped at the bottom of the stairs, and listened.

"I would'nt say it if I was sober!" retorted Jonas. "You know better. Have I never said it when I was sober?"

"Often, indeed!" she answered through her tears.

"Hark ye!" cried Jonas, stamping his foot upon the ground. "You made me bear your pretty humours once, and ecod I'll make you bear mine now. I always promised myself I would. I married you that I might. I'll know who's master, and who's slave!"

"Heaven knows I am obedient!" said the sobbing girl. "Much more so than I ever thought to be!"

Jonas laughed in his drunken exultation. "What! you're finding it out, are you! Patience, and you will in time! Griffins have claws, my girl. There's not a pretty slight you ever put upon me, nor a pretty trick you ever played me, nor a pretty insolence you ever showed me, that I won't pay back a hundred-fold. What else did I marry you for. *You, too!*" he said, with coarse contempt.

It might have softened him to hear her turn a little fragment of a song he used to say he liked; trying, with a heart so full, to win him back.

"Oho!" he said, "you're deaf, are you? You don't hear me, eh? So much the better for you. I hate you. I hate myself, for having been fool enough to strap a pack upon my back for the pleasure of treading on it whenever I choose. Why, things have opened to me, now, so that I might marry almost where I liked. But I wouldn't; I'd keep single. I ought to be single, among the friends I know. Instead of that, here I am, tied like a log to you. Pah! Why do you show your pale face when I come home? Am I never to forget you?"

"How late it is!" she said cheerfully: opening the shutter after an interval of silence. "Broad day, Jonas!"

"Broad day or black night, what do I care!" was the kind rejoinder.

"The night passed quickly, too. I don't mind sitting up, at all."

"Sit up for me again, if you dare!" growled Jonas.

"I was reading," she proceeded, "all night long. I began when you went out, and read till you came home again. The strangest story, Jonas! And true, the book says. I'll tell it you to-morrow."

"True, was it?" said Jonas, doggedly.

"So the book says."

"Was there anything in it, about a man's being determined to conquer his wife, break her spirit, bend her temper, crush all her humours like so many nutshells—kill her, for aught I know?" said Jonas.

"No. Not a word," she answered quickly.

"Ah!" he returned. "That'll be a true story though, before long; for all the book says nothing about it. It's a lying book, I see. A fit book for a lying reader. But you're deaf. I forgot that."

There was another interval of silence; and the boy was stealing away, when he heard her footstep on the floor, and stopped. She went up to him, as it seemed, and spoke lovingly: saying that she would defer to him in everything, and would consult his wishes and obey them, and they might be very happy if he would be gentle with her. He answered with an imprecation, and—

Not with a blow? Yes. Stern truth against the base-souled villain: with a blow.

No angry cries; no loud reproaches. Even her weeping and her sobs were stifled by her clinging round him. She only said, repeating it in agony of heart,

How could he, could he, could he! And lost utterance in tears.

Oh woman, God beloved in old Jerusalem! The best among us need deal lightly with thy faults, if only for the punishment thy nature will endure, in bearing heavy evidence against us, on the Day of Judgment!

V

BLACKMAIL

As a blackmailer Montague Tigg naturally made himself fully acquainted with the whole of the history of his prey, employing a "confidential agent," one Nadgett, for the purpose. He was therefore fully prepared with a counterblast when Jonas becoming somewhat restive, called on Tigg at his private house one morning, saying he was not satisfied with the state of affairs.

"The money comes in well enough, but it don't come out well enough. It can't be got at easily enough. I haven't sufficient power; it is all in your hands. . . . What's the use of my having a voice if it's always drowned? I might as well be dumb, and it would be much less aggravating. I'm not a-going to stand that, you know. . . ."

I've had some very good dinners here, but they'd come too dear on such terms: and therefore that won't do."

But Jonas's bombastic style had no effect whatever on the deeper and altogether more wily Tigg, who with a smile remarked that he was going to propose that he, Jonas, should invest still more with them, and should also influence his friends in a similar manner; "solely for your own advantage . . . it will be very much to your advantage I assure you." Having thus paved the way he fired his parting shot.

'He beckoned to Jonas to bring his chair nearer; and whispered in his ear.

From red to white, from white to red again; from red to yellow; then to a cold, dull, awful, sweat-bedabbled blue. In that short whisper, all these changes fell upon the face of Jonas Chuzzlewit; and when at last he laid his hand upon

the whisperer's mouth, appalled, lest any syllable of what he said should reach the ear of the third person present, it was as bloodless, and as heavy as the hand of Death.

He drew his chair away, and sat a spectacle of terror, misery, and rage. He was afraid to speak, or look, or move, or sit still. Abject, crouching, and miserable, he was a greater degradation to the form he bore, than if he had been a loathsome wound from head to heel.

His companion leisurely resumed his dressing, and completed it, glancing sometimes with a smile at the transformation he had effected, but never speaking once.

"You'll not object," he said, when he was quite equipped, "to venture further with us, Chuzzlewit, my friend?"

His pale lips faintly stammered out a "No."

"Well said! That's like yourself. Do you know I was thinking yesterday that your father-in-law, relying on your advice as a man of great sagacity in money matters, as no doubt you are, would join us, if the thing were well presented to him. He has money?"

"Yes, he has money."

"Shall I leave Mr. Pecksniff to you? Will you undertake for Mr. Pecksniff?"

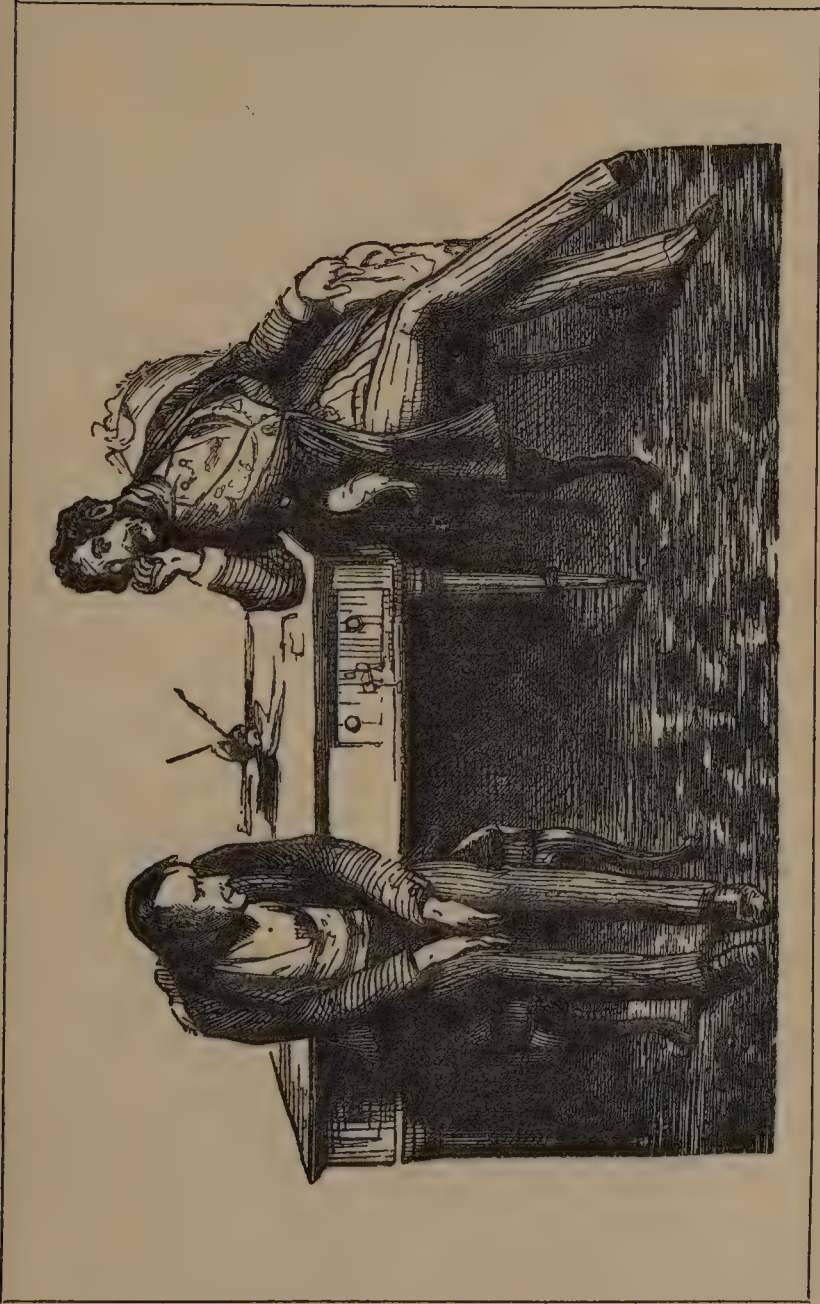
"I'll try. I'll do my best."

"A thousand thanks," replied the other, clapping him upon the shoulder. "Shall we walk down stairs?"

Quickly following on this interview, Jonas attempted to fly to the Continent; but he was traced by the ever watchful Nadgett, and brought back just as he was on the point of embarking. Cowed and beaten he was again confronted by the man who held his life in his hand, and was not ashamed to use the secret for his own ends.

"I wish you to venture . . . a little more with us, and to keep quiet," said Montague. "You promised me you would; and you must. I say it plainly, Chuzzlewit, you MUST. . . . I want you, besides, to act as a decoy in a case I have already told you of. You don't mind that, I know. You care nothing for the man. . . ."

Jonas left the window, and walked up close to him. He did not look him in the face; it was not his habit to do that; but he kept his eyes towards him—on his breast, or thereabouts—and was at great pains to speak slowly and distinctly in reply. Just as a man in a state of conscious drunkenness might be. . . .



“ I wish you to venture a little more with us, and keep quiet ”

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“Come! make things easy to me, and I’m yours. I don’t know that I may not be better off here, after all, than if I had gone away this morning. But here I am, and here I’ll stay now. Take your oath!”

He cleared his throat, for he was speaking hoarsely, and said in a lighter tone:—

“Shall I go to Pecksniff! When? Say when!”

“Immediately!” cried Montague. “He cannot be enticed too soon.” . . .

“We can concert our plans upon the road,” said Jonas. “We must not go direct to him, but cross over from some other place, and turn out of our way to see him. I may not want to introduce you, but I must have you on the spot.”

VI

THE ENTERPRISE

Then commenced the first stage in the enterprise of Mr. Jonas Chuzzlewit and his friend; the night was a fitting companion for the man who had only evil thoughts in his head. Tigg Montague wished they had never started on the journey; it was hardly the sort of night to travel in. Lurid flashes of lightning lit up the dark carriage and seemed to lay bare to Tigg the thoughts that Jonas was harbouring. In imagination Tigg could fancy an assault from his companion with the end of a bottle from which both had been drinking; and the climax came when a few miles short of their destination an accident happened; and Tigg was thrown in the road. Jonas was more fortunate, and saw his chance. In an apparent endeavour to calm the restive horses he unsuccessfully essayed to bring the wheels of the carriage over the prostrate body of his companion, and this not being possible he tried—again without success—to frighten the horses so that his companion would be trampled to death. No wonder Tigg had dreadful dreams that night and vowed once again to “travel home alone.”

The visit to Mr. Pecksniff the next day was eminently satisfactory.

‘There never had been before, and there never would be again, such an opportunity for the investment of a considerable sum (the rate of advantage increased in proportion to the

amount invested), as at that moment. The only time that had at all approached it, was the time when Jonas had come into the concern. . . . The sum which would complete the proprietorship in this snug concern was nearly equal to Mr. Pecksniff's whole hoard. . . . The returns began almost immediately, and were immense. The end of it was, that Mr. Pecksniff agreed to become the last partner and proprietor in the Anglo-Bengalee, and made an appointment to dine with Mr. Montague, at Salisbury, on the next day but one, and there to complete the negotiation. . . .

"You mean to wait at Salisbury over the day after to-morrow, do you, then?" said Jonas.

"You heard our appointment," returned Montague, without raising his eyes. "In any case I should have waited to see after the boy."

They appeared to have changed places again; Montague being in high spirits; Jonas gloomy and lowering.

"You don't want me, I suppose?" said Jonas.

"I want you to put your name here," he returned, glancing at him with a smile, "as soon as I have filled up the stamp. I may as well have your note of hand for that extra capital. That's all I want. If you wish to go home, I can manage Mr. Pecksniff now, alone. There is a perfect understanding between us."

Jonas sat scowling at him as he wrote, in silence. When he had finished his writing, and had dried it on the blotting-paper in his travelling-desk; he looked up, and tossed the pen towards him.

"What, not a day's grace, not a day's trust, eh?" said Jonas, bitterly. "Not after the pains I have taken with to-night's work?"

"To-night's work was a part of our bargain," replied Montague; "and so was this."

"You drive a hard bargain," said Jonas, advancing to the table. "You know best. Give it here!"

Montague gave him the paper. After pausing as if he could not make up his mind to put his name to it, Jonas dipped his pen hastily in the nearest inkstand, and began to write. But he had scarcely marked the paper when he started back, in a panic.

"Why, what the devil's this?" he said. "It's bloody!"

He had dipped the pen, as another moment showed, into red ink. But he attached a strange degree of importance to the mistake. He asked how it had come there, who

had brought it, why it had been brought; and looked at Montague, at first, as if he thought he had put a trick upon him. Even when he used a different pen, and the right ink, he made some scratches on another paper first, as half-believing they would turn red also.

“Black enough, this time,” he said, handing the note to Montague. “Good-bye.”

“Going now! How do you mean to get away from here?”

“I shall cross early in the morning, to the high road, before you are out of bed; and catch the day-coach, going up. Good-bye!”

“You are in a hurry!”

“I have Something to do,” said Jonas. “Good-bye!”

His friend looked after him as he went out, in surprise, which gradually gave place to an air of satisfaction and relief.

“It happens all the better. It brings about what I wanted, without any difficulty. I shall travel home alone.”

VII

THE MURDER OF MONTAGUE TIGG

The deep laid plans made by Jonas for the murder of Montague Tigg were simplicity themselves. The two days which Tigg had allowed himself at Salisbury to see the transaction through, gave Jonas sufficient time to return to London, fix up his alibi, and then disguised, double back to Salisbury and way-lay his victim. His instructions to his timorous wife were sharp and to the point:

“I have been travelling day and night, and am tired. I have lost some money, and that don’t improve me. Put my supper in the little off-room below, and have the truckle bed made. I shall sleep there to-night, and maybe to-morrow night; and if I can sleep all day to-morrow, so much the better, for I’ve got trouble to sleep off, if I can. Keep the house quiet, and don’t call me. Mind! Don’t call me. Don’t let anybody call me. Let me lie there.”

Then in the guise of a countryman, he cautiously made his exit from the house at night, and by an indirect route,

sometime riding and sometimes walking, neared his destination. From a copse two or three miles off he "tore out from a fence a thick, hard, knotted stake", and then on to Salisbury, where he "hung about the inn yard" while Pecksniff and Tigg were having their promised dinner.

The dinner over, Tigg accompanied Pecksniff part of the way home, "meaning to return by a pleasant track which Mr. Pecksniff had engaged to show him through some fields." At a stile they stopped. "This is the place my dear sir," said Pecksniff. "Keep the path and go straight through the little wood you'll come to. The path is narrow there but you can't miss it."

'He took the footpath.

The glory of the departing sun was on his face. The music of the birds was in his ears. Sweet wild flowers bloomed about him. Thatched roofs of poor men's homes were in the distance; and an old grey spire, surmounted by a Cross, rose up between him and the coming night.

He had never read the lesson which these things conveyed; he had ever mocked and turned away from it; but, before going down into a hollow place, he looked round, once, upon the evening prospect, sorrowfully. Then he went down, down, down, into the dell.

It brought him to the wood; a close, thick, shadowy wood, through which the path went winding on, dwindling away into a slender sheep-track. He paused before entering; for the stillness of this spot almost daunted him. . . .

As the sunlight died away, and evening fell upon the wood, he entered it. Moving, here and there, a bramble or a drooping bough which stretched across his path, he slowly disappeared. At intervals a narrow opening showed him passing on, or the sharp cracking of some tender branch denoted where he went: then, he was seen or heard no more.

Never more beheld by mortal eye or heard by mortal ear: one man excepted. That man, parting the leaves and branches on the other side, near where the path emerged again, came leaping out soon afterwards.

What had he left within the wood, that he sprang out of it, as if it were a hell!

The body of a murdered man. In one thick solitary spot, it lay among the last year's leaves of oak and beech, just as it had fallen headlong down. Sopping and soaking

in among the leaves that formed its pillow; oozing down into the boggy ground, as if to cover itself from human sight; forcing its way between and through the curling leaves, as if those senseless things rejected and foreswore it, and were coiled up in abhorrence; went a dark, dark stain that dyed the whole summer night from earth to heaven.

The doer of this deed came leaping from the wood so fiercely, that he cast into the air a shower of fragments of young boughs, torn away in his passage, and fell with violence upon the grass. But he quickly gained his feet again, and keeping underneath a hedge with his body bent, went running on towards the road. The road once reached he fell into a rapid walk, and set on towards London.

And he was not sorry for what he had done. He was frightened when he thought of it—when did he not think of it!—but he was not sorry. He had had a terror and dread of the wood when he was in it; but being out of it, and having committed the crime, his fears were now diverted, strangely, to the dark room he had left shut up at home. He had a greater horror, infinitely greater, of that room than of the wood. Now that he was on his return to it, it seemed beyond comparison more dismal and more dreadful than the wood. His hideous secret was shut up in the room, and all its terrors were there; to his thinking it was not in the wood at all.'

VIII

THE HOME COMING OF JONAS

Jonas's journey home, pursued by a horrible phantom, was safely accomplished, but dread of discovery was in his craven soul; Nadgett had kept careful watch on his movements.

'He had time enough to reach his own house unobserved, and before there were many people in the streets, if nothing had happened so far, tending to his discovery. . . . Hurrying across the road, and in and out of every by-way that lay near his course, at length approached his own dwelling. He used additional caution in his immediate neighbourhood; halting first to look all down the street before him; then

gliding swiftly through that one, and stopping to survey the next; and so on.

The passage-way was empty when his murderer's face looked into it. He stole on, to the door, on tiptoe, as if he dreaded to disturb his own imaginary rest.

He listened. Not a sound. As he turned the key with a trembling hand, and pushed the door softly open with his knee, a monstrous fear beset his mind.

What if the murdered man were there before him!

He cast a fearful glance all round. But there was nothing there.

He went in, locked the door, drew the key through and through the dust and damp in the fire-place to sully it again, and hung it up as of old. He took off his disguise, tied it up in a bundle ready for carrying away and sinking in the river before night, and locked it up in a cupboard. These precautions taken, he undressed, and went to bed.

The raging thirst, the fire that burnt within him as he lay beneath the clothes, the augmented horror of the room, when they shut it out from his view; the agony of listening, in which he paid enforced regard to every sound, and thought the most unlikely one the prelude to that knocking which should bring the news; the starts with which he left his couch and, looking in the glass, imagined that his deed was broadly written in his face, and lying down and burying himself once more beneath the blankets, heard his own heart beating Murder, Murder, Murder, in the bed; what words can paint tremendous truths like these!

The morning advanced. There were footsteps in the house. He heard the blinds drawn up, and shutters opened; and now and then a stealthy tread outside his own door. He tried to call out, more than once, but his mouth was dry as if it had been filled with sand. At last he sat up in his bed, and cried:

"Who's there!"

It was his wife.

He asked her what it was o'clock? Nine.

"Did—did no one knock at my door yesterday?" he faltered. "Something disturbed me; but unless you had knocked the door down, you would have got no notice from me."

"No one," she replied. That was well. He had waited, almost breathless, for her answer. It was a relief to him, if anything could be.

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“Mr. Nadgett wanted to see you,” she said, “but I told him you were tired, and had requested not to be disturbed. He said it was of little consequence, and went away. As I was opening my window, to let in the cool air, I saw him passing through the street this morning, very early; but he hasn’t been again.”

Passing through the street that morning? Very early! Jonas trembled at the thought of having had a narrow chance of seeing him himself: even him, who had no object but to avoid people, and sneak on unobserved, and keep his own secrets: and who saw nothing.’

How strongly does Dickens describe the workings of the murderer’s conscience; what we had hardly imagined could be in the possession of Jonas unceasingly plagues him until the end. All day long it worked him remorselessly; ever alert, he is waiting for—what?

‘Still listening! To every sound. He had listened ever since, and it had not come yet. The exposure of the Assurance office; the flight of Crimple and Bullamy with the plunder, and among the rest, as he feared, with his own bill, which he had not found in the pocket-book of the murdered man, and which with Mr. Pecksniff’s money had probably been remitted to one or other of those trusty friends for safe deposit at the banker’s; his immense losses, and peril of being still called to account as a partner in the broken firm; all these things rose in his mind at one time and always, but he could not contemplate them. He was aware of their presence, and of the rage, discomfiture, and despair, they brought along with them; but he thought—of his own controlling power and direction he thought—of the one dread question only. When they would find the body in the wood.

He tried—he had never left off trying—not to forget it was there, for that was impossible, but to forget to weary himself by drawing vivid pictures of it in his fancy: by going softly about it and about it among the leaves, approaching it nearer and nearer through a gap in the boughs, and startling the very flies that were thickly sprinkled all over it, like heaps of dried currants. His mind was fixed and fastened on the discovery, for intelligence of which he listened intently to every cry and shout; listened when anyone came in, or went out; watched from the window

the people who passed up and down the street; mistrusted his own looks and words. And the more his thoughts were set upon the discovery, the stronger was the fascination which attracted them to the thing itself: lying alone in the wood. He was for ever showing and presenting it, as it were, to every creature whom he saw. "Look here! Do you know of this? Is it found? Do you suspect *me*?" If he had been condemned to bear the body in his arms, and lay it down for recognition at the feet of every one he met, it could not have been more constantly with him, or a cause of more monotonous and dismal occupation than it was in this state of his mind.

Still he was not sorry. It was no contrition or remorse for what he had done that moved him; it was nothing but alarm for his own security. The vague consciousness he possessed of having wrecked his fortune in the murderous venture, intensified his hatred and revenge, and made him set the greater store by what he had gained. The man was dead; nothing could undo that. He felt a triumph yet, in the reflection.'

But the end was soon to come, relentlessly the finger of Nadgett pointed him out. "That is the man: by the window." And it took three men to hold him and manacle his wrists together!

IX

MURDER WILL OUT

"Murder," said Nadgett, looking round on the astonished group. "Let no one interfere."

The game was up: the race was at an end: the rope was ready for his neck! And the irony of it: his own cousin, Chevy Slyme, one time partner in adventure of Montague Tigg, was the chief officer in the arrest. "Kinsman" he had announced himself to old Martin Chuzzlewit, much to that man's amazement.

'He was sitting lazily across a chair with his arms resting on the back; eating nuts, and throwing the shells out of window as he cracked them; which he still continued to do while speaking.

"Aye," he said, with a sulky nod. "You may deny your nephews till you die, but Chevy Slyme is Chevy Slyme still, all the world over. Perhaps even you may feel it some disgrace to your own blood to be employed in this way. I'm to be bought off. . . . I took up with this trade on purpose to shame you. I didn't think I should have to make a capture in the family, though."

And then Slyme made a passing reference to his once boon companion Montague Tigg, who had dropped him in his prosperity—to leave him the fate of arresting his murderer.

"I have always expected that he and I would be brought together again in the course of business," said Slyme, taking a fresh handful of nuts from his pocket; "but I thought he would be wanted for some swindling job; it never entered my head that I should hold a warrant for the apprehension of his murderer."

"*His* murderer!" cried Mr. Chuzzlewit, looking from one to another.

"His or Mr. Montague's," said Nadgett. "They are the same, I am told. I accuse him yonder of the murder of Mr. Montague, who was found last night, killed, in a wood. You will ask me why I accuse him, as you have already asked me how I know so much. I'll tell you. It can't remain a secret long. . . . From the garret-window opposite," said Nadgett, pointing across the narrow street, "I have watched this house and him for days and nights. From that garret-window opposite I saw him return home, alone, from a journey on which he had set out with Mr. Montague. That was my token that Mr. Montague's end was gained; and I might rest easy on my watch, though I was not to leave it until he dismissed me. But, standing at the door opposite, after dark that same night, I saw a countryman steal out of this house, by a side-door in the court, who had never entered it. I knew his walk, and that it was himself, disguised. I followed him immediately. I lost him on the western road, still travelling westward."

Jonas looked up at him for an instant, and muttered an oath.

"I could not comprehend what this meant," said Nadgett; "but, having seen so much, I resolved to see it out, and through. And I did. Learning, on inquiry at his house

from his wife, that he was supposed to be sleeping in the room from which I had seen him go out, and that he had given strict orders not to be disturbed, I knew that he was coming back; and for his coming back I watched. I kept my watch in the street—in doorways, and such places—all that night; at the same window, all next day; and when night came on again, in the street once more. For I knew he would come back, as he had gone out, when this part of the town was empty. He did. Early in the morning, the same countryman came creeping, creeping, creeping home.”

“Look sharp!” interposed Slyme, who had now finished his nuts. “This is quite irregular, Mr. Nadgett.”

“I kept at the window all day,” said Nadgett, without heeding him. “I think I never closed my eyes. At night, I saw him come out with a bundle. I followed him again. He went down the steps at London Bridge, and sunk it in the river. I now began to entertain some serious fears, and made a communication to the Police, which caused that bundle to be—”

“To be fished up,” interrupted Slyme. “Be alive, Mr. Nadgett.”

“It contained the dress I had seen him wear,” said Nadgett; “stained with clay, and spotted with blood. Information of the murder was received in town last night. The wearer of that dress is already known to have been seen near the place; to have been lurking in that neighbourhood; and to have alighted from a coach coming from that part of the country, at a time exactly tallying with the very minute when I saw him returning home. The warrant has been out, and these officers have been with me, some hours. We chose our time; and seeing you come in, and seeing this person at the window—”

“Beckoned to him,” said Mark, taking up the thread of the narrative, on hearing this allusion to himself, “to open the door; which he did with a deal of pleasure.”

“That’s all at present,” said Nadgett, putting up his great pocket-book, which from mere habit he had produced when he began his revelation, and had kept in his hand all the time; “but there is plenty more to come. You asked me for the facts, so far I have related them, and need not detain these gentlemen any longer. Are you ready, Mr. Slyme?”

“And something more,” replied that worthy rising. “If you walk round to the office, we shall be there as soon as you. Tom! Get a coach!”

X

HOW JONAS CHEATED THE GALLOWS

The men gone, Jonas made a clumsy motion with his bound hands towards the door, to attract the attention of his relative Chevy Slyme, with a view to securing his release; or at least of cheating the gallows.

“Put your hand in my pocket. Here! The breast pocket, on the left!” said Jonas.

He did so; and drew out a purse.

“There’s a hundred pound in it,” said Jonas, whose words were almost unintelligible; as his face, in its pallor and agony, was scarcely human.

Slyme looked at him; gave it into his hands; and shook his head.

“I can’t. I daren’t. I couldn’t if I dared. Those fellows below—”

“Escape’s impossible,” said Jonas. “I know it. One hundred pound for only five minutes in the next room!”

“What to do?” he asked.

The face of his prisoner as he advanced to whisper in his ear, made him recoil involuntarily. But he stopped and listened to him. The words were few, but his own face changed as he heard them.

“I have it about me,” said Jonas, putting his hands to his throat, as though whatever he referred to were hidden in his neckerchief. “How should you know of it? How could you know? A hundred pound for only five minutes in the next room! The time’s passing. Speak!”

“It would be more—more creditable to the family,” observed Slyme, with trembling lips. “I wish you hadn’t told me half so much. Less would have served your purpose. You might have kept it to yourself.”

“A hundred pound for only five minutes in the next room! Speak!” cried Jonas, desperately.

He took the purse. Jonas, with a wild unsteady step, retreated to the door in the glass partition.

“Stop!” cried Slyme, catching at his skirts. “I don’t know about this. Yet it must end so at last. Are you guilty?”

“Yes!” said Jonas. . . .

“Will you—will you engage to say a—a Prayer, now, or something of that sort?” faltered Slyme.

Jonas broke from him without replying, and closed the door between them.

Slyme listened at the keyhole. After that, he crept away on tiptoe, as far off as he could; and looked awfully towards the place. He was roused by the arrival of the coach, and their letting down the steps.

“He’s getting a few things together,” he cried, leaning out of window, and speaking to the two men below, who stood in the full light of a street-lamp. “Keep your eye upon the back, one of you, for form’s sake.”

One of the men withdrew into the court. The other, seating himself on the steps of the coach, remained in conversation with Slyme at the window: who perhaps had risen to be his superior, in virtue of his old propensity (one so much lauded by the murdered man) of being always round the corner. A useful habit in his present calling.

“Where is he?” asked the man.

Slyme looked into the room for an instant and gave his head a jerk, as much as to say, “Close at hand. I see him.”

“He’s booked,” observed the man.

“Through,” said Slyme.

They looked at each other, and up and down the street. The man on the coach-steps took his hat off, and put it on again, and whistled a little.

“I say! He’s taking his time!” he remonstrated.

“I allowed him five minutes,” said Slyme. “Time’s more than up, though. I’ll bring him down.” . . .

It was not easy, he found, to make up his mind to the opening of the door. But he flung it wide open suddenly, and with a noise; then retreated. After peeping in and listening again, he entered.

He started back as his eyes met those of Jonas, standing in an angle of the wall, and staring at him. His neckerchief was off; his face was ashy pale.

“You’re too soon,” said Jonas, with an abject whimper. “I’ve not had time. I have not been able to do it. I—five minutes more—two minutes more!—Only one!”

Slyme gave him no reply, but thrusting the purse upon him and forcing it back into his pocket, called up his men.

He whined, and cried, and cursed, and entreated them, and struggled, and submitted, in the same breath, and had

no power to stand. They got him away and into the coach, where they put him on a seat; but he soon fell moaning down among the straw at the bottom, and lay there.

The two men were with him; Slyme being on the box with the driver; and they let him lie. Happening to pass a fruiterer's on their way; the door of which was open, though the shop was by this time shut; one of them remarked how faint the peaches smelt.

The other assented at the moment, but presently stooped down in quick alarm, and looked at the prisoner.

"Stop the coach! He has poisoned himself! The smell comes from this bottle in his hand!"

The hand had shut upon it tight. With that rigidity of grasp with which no living man, in the full strength and energy of life, can clutch a prize he has won.

They dragged him out into the dark street; but jury, judge, and hangman, could have done no more, and could do nothing now. Dead, dead, dead.'



CHAPTER TEN

THE YORKSHIRE SCHOOLMASTER

I

TAKEN FROM LIFE

ALTHOUGH acknowledged to be so true to life, not all Dickens's characters—much less his rogues and vagabonds—were actually drawn from life. More often than not, as is the case with all true artists, the characters arose out of composite pictures, probably suggested in the first place by a certain character. Thus Merdle—to whom Chapter I is specially devoted, was undoubtedly suggested by John Sadlier, at one time a Junior Lord of the Treasury, Chairman of the London and County Joint Stock Bank, a forger and a swindler, who committed suicide in 1856 and caused a great sensation at the time.

Mademoiselle Hortense in *Bleak House*, lady's maid to Lady Dedlock, and murderess of Mr. Tulkinghorn, is said to have owed her inception to Mrs. Manning whom Dickens saw hanged in 1849, and after which he wrote his strong condemnation of public capital punishment in a letter to *The Times*, which resulted in the abolition of these degrading spectacles.

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Julius Slinkton, the murderer in *Hunted Down*, had for his original Thomas Griffiths Wainwright, the notorious poisoner.

But of all the criminals "taken from life" by Dickens, Wackford Squeers stands first and foremost. Squeers was the first character for which Dickens made a special study. Other characters such as Mr. Pickwick, Sam Weller, Fagin, and Mr. Fang, all had their originals, but they crept almost imperceptibly into the story he had to tell. Squeers was in quite a different category.

II

A SEARCH FOR REALITY

The full story of how Dickens came to meet this Yorkshire schoolmaster is told by him in the preface to *Nicholas Nickleby*.

'I went down into Yorkshire before I began this book, in very severe winter-time which is pretty faithfully described herein. As I wanted to see a schoolmaster or two, and was forewarned that those gentlemen might, in their modesty, be shy of receiving a visit from the author of the *Pickwick Papers*, I consulted with a professional friend who had a Yorkshire connection, and with whom I concerted a pious fraud.'

This was Charles Smithson, of Malton, Yorkshire, partner of Dickens's old schoolfellow, Thomas Mitton, who practised as a solicitor at 23 Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, London.

'He gave me some letters of introduction, in the name, I think, of my travelling companion; they bore reference to a supposititious little boy who had been left with a widowed mother who didn't know what to do with him; the poor lady had thought, as a means of thawing the tardy compassion of her relations in his behalf, of sending him to a Yorkshire school; I was the poor lady's friend, travelling that way; and if the recipient of the letter could inform me of a school in his neighbourhood, the writer would be very much obliged.

I went to several places in that part of the country where I understood the schools to be most plentifully sprinkled, and had no occasion to deliver a letter until I came to a certain town which shall be nameless. The person to whom it was addressed was not at home; but he came down at night, through the snow, to the inn where I was staying. It was after dinner; and he needed little persuasion to sit down by the fire in a warm corner, and take his share of the wine that was on the table.

I am afraid he is dead now. I recollect he was a jovial, ruddy, broad-faced man; that we got acquainted directly; and that we talked on all kinds of subjects, except the school, which he showed a great anxiety to avoid. Was there any large school near? I asked him, in reference to the letter. "Oh yes," he said; "there was a pratty big 'un." "Was it a good one?" I asked. "Ey!" he said, "it was as good as anoother; that was a' a matther of opinion;" and fell to looking at the fire, staring round the room, and whistling a little. On my reverting to some other topic that we had been discussing, he recovered immediately; but, though I tried him again and again, I never approached the question of the school, even if he were in the middle of a laugh, without observing that his countenance fell, and that he became uncomfortable.

At last, when we had passed a couple of hours or so very agreeably, he suddenly took up his hat and leaning over the table, and looking me full in the face, said in a low voice.

"Weel, Misther, we've been vary pleasant toogather, and ar'll spak my moind tiv'ee. Dinnot let the weedur send her lattle boy to yon o' our schoolmeasters, while there's a house to hoold 'im a' Lunnun, or a gotther to lie asleep in."

The original of John Browdie was Richard Barnes, the Yorkshire agent of Smithson, of whom Dickens wrote to Mrs. S. C. Hall on the 29th December, 1838:

'I went down in an assumed name, taking a plausible letter to an old Yorkshire attorney in town, telling him how a friend had been left a widow and wanted to place her boys at a Yorkshire school, in hopes of thawing the frozen compassion of her relations. The man of business gave me an introduction to one or two schools, but at night he came down to the Inn where I was stopping, and after much hesitation and confusion—he was a large-headed, flat-nosed,

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red-faced, old fellow—said with a degree of feeling one would not have given him credit for, that the matter had been upon his mind all day—that they were sad places for mothers to send their orphan boys to—that he hoped I would not give him up as my adviser—but that she had better do anything with them—let them hold horses, run errands—fling them in any way upon the mercy of the World—rather than trust them there. This was an attorney, a well-fed man of business, and a rough Yorkshireman.

Depend upon it that the rascalities of those Yorkshire schoolmasters cannot easily be exaggerated, and that I have kept down the strong truth and thrown as much comicality over it as I could, rather than disgust and weary the reader with its fouler aspects. The identical scoundrel you speak of I saw—curiously enough. His name is Shaw; the action was tried (I believe) eight or ten years since, and if I am not much mistaken another action was brought against him by the parents of a miserable child, a cancer in whose head he opened with an inky penknife, and so caused his death.

The country for miles round was covered, when I was there, with deep snow. There is an old church near the school, and the first grave-stone I stumbled on that dreary winter afternoon was placed above the grave of a boy, eighteen long years old, who had died—suddenly the inscription said; I suppose his heart broke—the camel falls down “suddenly” when they heap the last load upon his back—died at that wretched place. I think his ghost put Smike into my head, upon the spot.’

Not far from Dotheboys Hall is the village church, and in the churchyard Shaw and his son lie buried. The churchyard also contains a stone to the memory of George Ashton Taylor, aged 19 “who died suddenly at Mr. William Shaw’s Academy 1822”.

This was the grave visited by Dickens, as he tells us in the above letter.

“The delightful village of Dotheboys” has its prototype in Bowes, and the “Hall” is to be seen at the far end of the village on the left, going towards Gretna Green. It is now known as The Villa and has undergone much alteration in recent years, the old schoolroom having been demolished: the yard with the pump is still to be seen at the rear.

In the days Dickens visited the district, it was kept by one William Shaw, whose "professional card" was worded as follows:

"At Bowes Academy near Greta Bridge, Yorkshire; youth are carefully instructed in the English, Latin, and Greek languages, Writing, Common and Decimal Arithmetic, Book-keeping, Mensuration, Surveying, Geometry, Geography, and Navigation, with the most useful branches of the Mathematics, and are provided with Board, Clothes, and every necessary at Twenty Guineas per annum each. No vacations except by the Parents' desire.

N.B. The French Language Two Guineas per annum extra.

Mr. Shaw attends at the George and Blue Boar, High Holborn, the first three weeks in the months of January and July."

The Diary that Dickens kept very spasmodically in the early part of 1838 records the following significant information under date of February 3rd.

'Shaw the schoolmaster we saw to-day is the man in whose school several boys went blind some time since, from gross neglect. The case was tried and the verdict went against him. It must have been between 1823 and 1826. Look this out in the newspaper.'

As a matter of fact the trial was on October 30th, 1823, and £300 damages were awarded against Shaw: and on the following day there was another action against Shaw, withdrawn after the first witness, on the payment of a similar amount of damages.

III

DOTHEBOYS HALL

The advertisement as drawn up by Mr. Squeers read:

'Education—At Mr. Wackford Squeers's Academy, Dotheboys Hall, at the delightful village of Dotheboys, near Greta Bridge in Yorkshire. Youth are boarded, clothed

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booked, furnished with pocket-money, provided with all necessaries, instructed in all languages, living and dead, mathematics, orthography, geometry, astronomy, trigonometry, the use of the globes, algebra, single stick (if required), writing, arithmetic, fortification, and every other branch of classical literature. Terms, twenty guineas per annum. No extras, no vacations, and diet unparalleled. Mr. Squeers is in town, and attends daily, from one till four, at the Saracen's Head, Snow Hill. N.B.—An able assistant wanted. Annual salary £5. A Master of Arts would be preferred."

Nicholas Nickleby—through his Uncle Ralph—obtained the situation as Assistant Master at Dotheboys Hall, and travelled down into Yorkshire with the master and the pupils on just such another winter's day as that on which Dickens himself made the journey with Phiz. Mr. Squeers's appearance we are told was not prepossessing.

'He had but one eye, and the popular prejudice runs in favour of two. The eye he had was unquestionably useful, but decidedly not ornamental: being of a greenish-gray, and in shape resembling the fanlight of a street door. The blank side of his face was much wrinkled and puckered up, which gave him a very sinister appearance, especially when he smiled, at which times his expression bordered closely on the villainous. His hair was very flat and shiny save at the ends, where it was brushed stiffly up from a low protruding forehead, which assorted well with his harsh voice and coarse manner. He was about two or three-and-fifty, and a trifle below the middle size; he wore a white neckerchief with long ends, and a suit of scholastic black; but his coat sleeves being a great deal too long, and his trousers a great deal too short, he appeared ill at ease in his clothes, and as if he were in a perpetual state of astonishment at finding himself so respectable.'

Here is a graphic description of the school room and the scholars, as beheld by Nicholas the morning after his arrival at "Dotheboys Hall", which was not by any means known on the spot as a "Hall"!

'A bare and dirty room, with a couple of windows, whereof a tenth part might be of glass, the remainder being stopped



Squeers and Snawley

up with old copybooks and paper. There were a couple of long, old, rickety desks, cut and notched, and inked, and damaged, in every possible way; two or three forms; a detached desk for Squeers; and another for his assistant. The ceiling was supported, like that of a barn, by cross beams and rafters; and the walls were so stained and discoloured, that it was impossible to tell whether they had ever been touched with paint or whitewash. . . .

Pale and haggard faces, lank and bony figures, children with the countenances of old men, deformities with irons upon their limbs, boys of stunted growth, and others whose long meagre legs would hardly bear their stooping bodies, all crowded on the view together; there were the bleared eye, the hare lip, the crooked foot, and every ugliness or distortion that told of unnatural aversion conceived by parents for their offspring, or of young lives which, from the earliest dawn of infancy, had been one horrible endurance of cruelty and neglect. There were little faces which should have been handsome, darkened with the scowl of sullen, dogged suffering; there was childhood with the light of its eye quenched, its beauty gone, and its helplessness alone remaining; there were vicious-faced boys, brooding, with leaden eyes, like malefactors, in a jail; and there were young creatures on whom the sins of their frail parents had descended, weeping even for the mercenary nurses they had known, and lonesome even in their loneliness.

With every kindly sympathy and affection blasted in its birth, with every young and healthy feeling flogged and starved down, with every revengeful passion that can fester in swollen hearts, eating its evil way to their core in silence, what an incipient hell was breeding here!

IV

BRIMSTONE AND TREACLE MORNING AT DOTHEBOYS
HALL

“Drat the things,” said the lady, opening the cupboard; “I can’t find the school spoon anywhere.”

“Never mind it, my dear,” observed Squeers, in a soothing manner; “it’s of no consequence.”

“No consequence; why, how you talk!” retorted Mrs. Squeers sharply; “isn’t it brimstone morning?”

“I forgot, my dear,” rejoined Squeers; “yes, it certainly is. We purify the boys’ blood now and then, Nickleby.”

“Purify fiddlesticks’ ends,” said his lady. “Don’t think, young man, that we go to the expense of flower of brimstone and molasses just to purify them; because if you think we carry on the business in that way you’ll find yourself mistaken, and so I tell you plainly.”

“My dear,” said Squeers, frowning. “Hem!”

“Oh! nonsense,” rejoined Mrs. Squeers. “If the young man comes to be a teacher here, let him understand at once that we don’t want any foolery about the boys. They have the brimstone and treacle, partly because if they hadn’t something or other in the way of medicine they’d be always ailing and giving a world of trouble, and partly because it spoils their appetites and comes cheaper than breakfast and dinner. So, it does them good and us good, at the same time, and that’s fair enough, I’m sure.”

Now, the fact was, that both Mr. and Mrs. Squeers viewed the boys in the light of their proper and natural enemies; or, in other words, they held and considered that their business and profession was to get as much from every boy as could by possibility be screwed out of him. On this point they were both agreed, and behaved in unison accordingly. The only difference between them was, that Mrs. Squeers waged war against the enemy openly and fearlessly, and that Squeers covered his rascality, even at home, with a spice of his habitual deceit; as if he really had a notion of some day or other being able to take himself in, and persuade his own mind that he was a very good fellow.

Mrs. Squeers stood at one of the desks, presiding over an immense basin of brimstone and treacle, of which delicious compound she administered a large instalment to each boy in succession: using for the purpose a common wooden spoon, which might have been originally manufactured for some gigantic top, and which widened every young gentleman’s mouth considerably, they being all obliged, under heavy corporal penalties, to take in the whole of the bowl at a gasp.’

THE YORKSHIRE SCHOOL SYSTEM

'After some half-hour's delay, Mr. Squeers appeared, and the boys took their places and their books, of which latter commodity the average was about one to eight learners. A few minutes having elapsed, during which Mr. Squeers looked very profound, as if he had a perfect apprehension of what was inside all the books, and could say every word of their contents by heart if he only chose to take the trouble, that gentleman called up the first class.

Obedient to this summons there ranged themselves in front of the schoolmaster's desk half a dozen scarecrows, out at knees and elbows, one of whom placed a torn and filthy book beneath his learned eye.

"This is the first class in English spelling and philosophy, Nickleby," said Squeers, beckoning Nicholas to stand beside him. "We'll get up a Latin one, and hand that over to you. Now, then, where's the first boy?"

"Please, sir, he's cleaning the back parlour window," said the temporary head of the philosophical class.

"So he is, to be sure," rejoined Squeers. "We go upon the practical mode of teaching, Nickleby; the regular education system. C-l-e-a-n, clean, verb active, to make bright, to scour. W-i-n, win, d-e-r, der, winder, a casement. When the boy knows this out of book, he goes and does it. It's just the same principle as the use of the globes. Where's the second boy?"

"Please, sir, he's weeding the garden," replied a small voice.

"To be sure," said Squeers, by no means disconcerted. "So he is. B-o-t, bot, t-i-n, tin, bottin, n-e-y, ney, bottinney, noun substantive, a knowledge of plants. When he has learned that bottinney means a knowledge of plants, he goes and knows 'em. That's our system, Nickleby; what do you think of it?"

"It's a very useful one, at any rate," answered Nicholas significantly.

"I believe you," rejoined Squeers, not remarking the emphasis of his usher. "Third boy, what's a horse?"

"A beast, sir," replied the boy.

"So it is," said Squeers. "Ain't it, Nickleby?"

"I believe there is no doubt of that, sir," answered Nicholas.

"Of course there isn't," said Squeers. "A horse is a quadruped, and quadruped's Latin for beast, as everybody that's gone through the grammar knows, or else where's the use of having grammars at all?"

"Where, indeed!" said Nicholas abstractedly.

"As you're perfect in that," resumed Squeers, turning to the boy, "go and look after *my* horse, and rub him down well, or I'll rub you down. The rest of the class go and draw water up till somebody tells you to leave off, for it's washing day to-morrow, and they want the coppers filled."

So saying, he dismissed the first class to their experiments in practical philosophy, and eyed Nicholas with a look, half cunning and half doubtful, as if he were not altogether certain what he might think of him by this time.

"That's the way we do it, Nickleby," he said, after a pause.

Nicholas shrugged his shoulders in a manner that was scarcely perceptible, and said he saw it was.

"And a very good way it is, too," said Squeers. "Now, just take them fourteen little boys and hear them some reading, because, you know, you must begin to be useful, and idling about here won't do."

VI

MR. SQUEERS'S HALF YEARLY REPORT

'It was Mr. Squeers's custom to call the boys together, and make a sort of report, after every half-yearly visit to the metropolis, regarding the relations and friends he had seen, the news he had heard, the letters he had brought down, the bills which had been paid, the accounts which had been left unpaid, and so forth. This solemn proceeding always took place in the afternoon of the day succeeding his return; perhaps, because the boys acquired strength of mind from the suspense of the morning, or possibly because Mr. Squeers himself acquired greater sternness and inflexibility from certain warm potations in which he was wont to indulge after his early dinner.

Be this as it may, the boys were recalled from the house window, garden, stable, and cow-yard, and the school

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were assembled in full conclave, when Mr. Squeers, with a small bundle of papers in his hand, and Mrs. S., following with a pair of canes, entered the room and proclaimed silence.

"Let any boy speak a word without leave," said Mr. Squeers mildly, "and I'll take the skin off his back."

This special proclamation had the desired effect, and a deathlike silence immediately prevailed, in the midst of which Mr. Squeers went on to say—

"Boys, I've been to London, and have returned to my family and you as strong and well as ever."

According to half-yearly custom, the boys gave three feeble cheers at this refreshing intelligence. Such cheers! Sighs of extra strength with the chill on.

"I have seen the parents of some boys," continued Squeers, turning over his papers, "and they're so glad to hear how their sons are getting on, that there's no prospect at all of their going away, which of course is a very pleasant thing to reflect upon, for all parties."

Two or three hands went to two or three eyes when Squeers said this, but the greater part of the young gentlemen, having no particular parents to speak of, were wholly uninterested in the thing one way or other.

"I have had disappointments to contend against," said Squeers, looking very grim; "Bolder's father was two pound ten short. Where is Bolder?"

"Here he is, please, sir," rejoined twenty officious voices. Boys are very like men to be sure.

"Come here, Bolder," said Squeers.

An unhealthy-looking boy, with warts all over his hands, stepped from his place to the master's desk, and raised his eyes imploringly to Squeers's face; his own quite white from the rapid beating of his heart.

"Bolder," said Squeers, speaking very slowly, for he was considering, as the saying goes, where to have him, "Bolder, if your father thinks that because—— Why, what's this, sir?"

As Squeers spoke, he caught up the boy's hand by the cuff of his jacket, and surveyed it with an edifying aspect of horror and disgust.

"What do you call this, sir?" demanded the schoolmaster, administering a cut with the cane to expedite a reply.

"I can't help it, indeed, sir," rejoined the boy, crying,

"They will come; it's the dirty work, I think, sir—at least, I don't know what it is, sir, but it's not my fault."

"Bolder," said Squeers, tucking up his wristbands, and moistening the palm of his right hand to get a good grip of the cane, "you're an incorrigible young scoundrel, and as the last thrashing did you no good, we must see what another will do towards beating it out of you."

With this, and wholly disregarding a piteous cry for mercy, Mr. Squeers fell upon the boy and caned him soundly; not leaving off, indeed, until his arm was tired out.

"There," said Squeers, when he had quite done; "rub as hard as you like, you won't rub that off in a hurry. Oh! you won't hold that noise, won't you? Put him out, Smike."

The drudge knew better, from long experience, than to hesitate about obeying, so he bundled the victim out by a side door, and Mr. Squeers perched himself again on his own stool, supported by Mrs. Squeers, who occupied another at his side.

"Now let us see," said Squeers. "A letter for Cobbey. Stand up, Cobbey."

Another boy stood up, and eyed the letter very hard, while Squeers made a mental abstract of the same.

"Oh!" said Squeers! "Cobbey's grandmother is dead, and his uncle John has took to drinking, which is all the news his sister sends, except eighteenpence, which will just pay for that broken square of glass. Mrs. Squeers, my dear, will you take the money?"

The worthy lady pocketed the eighteenpence with a most business-like air, and Squeers passed on to the next boy, as coolly as possible.

"Graymarsh," said Squeers, "he's the next. Stand up, Graymarsh."

Another boy stood up, and the schoolmaster looked over the letter as before.

"Graymarsh's maternal aunt," said Squeers, when he had possessed himself of the contents, "is very glad to hear he's so well and happy, and sends her respectful compliments to Mrs. Squeers, and thinks she must be an angel. She likewise thinks Mr. Squeers is too good for this world; but hopes he may long be spared to carry on the business. Would have sent the two pairs of stockings as desired, but is short of money, so forwards a tract instead, and hopes

Graymarsh will put his trust in Providence. Hopes, above all, that he will study in everything to please Mr. and Mrs. Squeers, and look upon them as his only friends; and that he will love Master Squeers; and not object to sleeping five in a bed, which no Christian should. Ah!" said Squeers, folding it up, "a delightful letter. Very affecting indeed."

It was affecting in one sense, for Graymarsh's maternal aunt was strongly supposed, by her more intimate friends, to be no other than his maternal parent; Squeers, however, without alluding to this part of the story (which would have sounded immoral before boys), proceeded with the business by calling out "Mobbs," whereupon another boy rose, and Graymarsh resumed his seat.

"Mobbs's mother-in-law," said Squeers, "took to her bed on hearing that he wouldn't eat fat, and has been very ill ever since. She wishes to know, by an early post, where he expects to go if he quarrels with his vittles; and with what feelings he could turn up his nose at the cow's liver broth, after his good master had asked a blessing on it. This was told her in the London newspapers—not by Mr. Squeers, for he's too kind and good to set anybody against anybody—and it has vexed her so much, Mobbs can't think. She is sorry to find he is discontented, which is sinful and horrid, and hopes Mr. Squeers will flog him into a happier state of mind; with which view she has also stopped his halfpenny a week pocket-money, and given a double bladed knife with a corkscrew in it to the missionaries, which she had bought on purpose for him."

"A sulky state of feeling," said Squeers, after a terrible pause, during which he had moistened the palm of his right hand again, "won't do. Cheerfulness and contentment must be kept up. Mobbs, come to me!"

Mobbs moved slowly towards the desk, rubbing his eyes in anticipation of good cause for doing so; and he soon afterwards retired by the side door, with as good cause as a boy need have.

Mr. Squeers then proceeded to open a miscellaneous collection of letters, some inclosing money, which Mrs. Squeers "took care of;" and others referring to small articles of apparel, as caps, and so forth, all of which the same lady stated to be too large, or too small, and calculated for nobody but young Squeers, who would appear, indeed, to have had most accommodating limbs, since everything

that came into the school fitted him to a nicety. His head, in particular, must have been singularly elastic, for hats and caps of all dimensions were alike to him.'

VII

SMIKE

One of the boys who particularly attracted the attention of Nicholas was a poor friendless drudge of about seventeen years of age, called Smike. This boy had the temerity to run away from this house of torment, and both Mr. and Mrs. Squeers went in search for him, one going one way, the other another. It was Mrs. Squeers who was the successful one, and the home-coming of Smike and its far-reaching result is told in the following extract.

'Another day came, and Nicholas was scarcely awake when he heard the wheels of a chaise approaching the house. It stopped. The voice of Mrs. Squeers was heard, and in exultation, ordering a glass of spirits for somebody, which was in itself a sufficient sign that something extraordinary had happened. Nicholas hardly dared to look out of the window; but he did so, and the very first object that met his eyes was the wretched Smike; so bedabbled with mud and rain, so haggard, and worn, and wild, that, but for his garments being such as no scarecrow was ever seen to wear, he might have been doubtful, even then, of his identity.

"Lift him out," said Squeers, after he had literally feasted his eyes, in silence, upon the culprit. "Bring him in; bring him in!"

"Take care," cried Mrs. Squeers, as her husband proffered his assistance. "We tied his legs under the apron and made 'em fast to the chaise to prevent him giving us the slip again."

With hands trembling with delight, Squeers unloosened the cord, and Smike, to all appearance more dead than alive, was brought into the house and securely locked up in a cellar, until such time as Mr. Squeers should deem it expedient to operate upon him, in presence of the assembled school.

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Upon a hasty consideration of the circumstances, it may be matter of surprise to some persons that Mr. and Mrs. Squeers should have taken so much trouble to repossess themselves of an encumbrance of which it was their wont to complain so loudly; but their surprise will cease when they are informed that the manifold services of the drudge, if performed by anybody else, would have cost the establishment some ten or twelve shillings per week in the shape of wages; and furthermore, that all runaways were, as a matter of policy, made severe examples of at Dotheboys Hall, inasmuch as, in consequence of the limited extent of its attractions, there was but little inducement, beyond the powerful impulse of fear, for any pupil, provided with the usual number of legs and the power of using them, to remain.

The news that Smike had been caught and brought back in triumph, ran like wild-fire through the hungry community, and expectation was on tiptoe all the morning. On tiptoe it was destined to remain, however, until afternoon; when Squeers, having refreshed himself with his dinner, and further strengthened himself by an extra libation or so, made his appearance (accompanied by his amiable partner) with a countenance of portentous import, and a fearful instrument of flagellation, strong, supple, wax-ended, and new—in short, purchased that morning, expressly for the occasion.

“Is every boy here?” asked Squeers, in a tremendous voice.

Every boy was there, but every boy was afraid to speak; so Squeers glared along the lines to assure himself; and every eye drooped, and every head cowered down as he did so.

“Each boy keep his place,” said Squeers, administering his favourite blow to the desk, and regarding with gloomy satisfaction the universal start which it never failed to occasion. “Nickleby! to your desk, sir.”

It was remarked by more than one small observer, that there was a very curious and unusual expression in the usher's face; but he took his seat without opening his lips in reply. Squeers, casting a triumphant glance at his assistant, and a look of most comprehensive despotism on the boys, left the room, and shortly afterwards returned, dragging Smike by the collar—or rather by that fragment of his jacket which was nearest the place where his collar would have been, had he boasted such a declaration.

In any other place the appearance of the wretched, jaded, spiritless object would have occasioned a murmur of compassion and remonstrance. It had some effect even there; for the lookers-on moved uneasily in their seats; and a few of the boldest ventured to steal looks at each other, expressive of indignation and pity.

They were lost on Squeers, however, whose gaze was fastened on the luckless Smike, as he inquired, according to custom in such cases, whether he had anything to say for himself.

"Nothing, I suppose," said Squeers, with a diabolical grin.

Smike glanced round, and his eye rested, for an instant, on Nicholas, as if he had expected him to intercede; but his look was riveted on his desk.

"Have you anything to say?" demanded Squeers again, giving his right arm two or three flourishes to try its power and suppleness. "Stand a little out of the way, Mrs. Squeers, my dear; I've hardly got room enough."

"Spare me, sir," cried Smike.

"Oh! that's all, is it?" said Squeers. "Yes, I'll flog you within an inch of your life, and spare you that."

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Mrs. Squeers, "that's a good 'un!"

"I was driven to do it," said Smike faintly; and casting another imploring look about him.

"Driven to do it, were you?" said Squeers. "Oh! it wasn't your fault; it was mine, I suppose—eh?"

"A nasty, ungrateful, pig-headed, brutish, obstinate, sneaking dog," exclaimed Mrs. Squeers, taking Smike's head under her arm, and administering a cuff at every epithet; "what does he mean by that?"

"Stand aside, my dear," replied Squeers. "We'll try and find out."

Mrs. Squeers, being out of breath with her exertions, complied. Squeers caught the boy firmly in his grip; one desperate cut had fallen on his body—he was wincing from the lash and uttering a scream of pain—it was raised again, and again about to fall—when Nicholas Nickleby, suddenly starting up, cried, "Stop!" in a voice that made the rafters ring.

"Who cried stop?" said Squeers, turning savagely round.

"I," said Nicholas, stepping forward. "This must not go on."

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"Must not go on!" cried Squeers, almost in a shriek.

"No!" thundered Nicholas.

Aghast and stupefied by the boldness of the interference, Squeers released his hold of Smike, and, falling back a pace or two, gazed upon Nicholas with looks that were positively frightful.

"I say, must not," repeated Nicholas, nothing daunted; "shall not. I will prevent it."

Squeers continued to gaze upon him, with his eyes starting out of his head; but astonishment had actually, for the moment, bereft him of speech. . . .

"Sit down, beggar!" screamed Squeers, almost beside himself with rage, and seizing Smike as he spoke.

"Wretch," rejoined Nicholas fiercely, "touch him at your peril! I will not stand by and see it done. My blood is up, and I have the strength of ten such men as you. Look to yourself, for by Heaven, I will not spare you, if you drive me on!"

"Stand back," cried Squeers, brandishing his weapon.

"I have a long series of insults to avenge," said Nicholas, flushed with passion; "and my indignation is aggravated by the dastardly cruelties practised on helpless infancy in this foul den. Have a care; for if you do raise the devil within me, the consequences shall fall heavily upon your own head!"

He had scarcely spoken, when Squeers, in a violent outbreak of wrath, and with a cry like the howl of a wild beast, spat upon him, and struck him a blow across the face with his instrument of torture, which raised up a bar of livid flesh as it was inflicted. Smarting with the agony of the blow, and concentrating into that one moment all his feelings of rage, scorn, and indignation, Nicholas sprang upon him, wrested the weapon from his hand, and pinning him by the throat, beat the ruffian till he roared for mercy.

The boys—with the exception of Master Squeers, who, coming to his father's assistance, harassed the enemy in the rear—moved not hand or foot; but Mrs. Squeers, with many shrieks for aid, hung on to the tail of her partner's coat, and endeavoured to drag him from his infuriated adversary; while Miss Squeers, who had been peeping through the keyhole in expectation of a very different scene, darted in at the very beginning of the attack, and after launching a shower of inkstands at the usher's head, beat Nicholas to her heart's content, animating herself at every

blow with the recollection of his having refused her proffered love, and thus imparting additional strength to an arm which (as she took after her mother in this respect) was, at no time, one of the weakest.

Nicholas, in the full torrent of his violence, felt the blows no more than if they had been dealt with feathers; but, becoming tired of the noise and uproar, and feeling that his arm grew weak besides, he threw all his remaining strength into half a dozen finishing cuts, and flung Squeers from him with all the force he could muster. The violence of his fall precipitated Mrs. Squeers completely over an adjacent form; and Squeers, striking his head against it in his descent, lay at his full length on the ground, stunned and motionless.

Having brought affairs to this happy termination, and ascertained to his thorough satisfaction that Squeers was only stunned, and not dead (upon which point he had had some unpleasant doubts at first), Nicholas left his family to restore him, and retired to consider what course he had better adopt.'

VIII

DOTHEBOYS HALL BREAKS UP

Squeers did not receive the punishment that was his due for the abominations at Dotheboys Hall. Few, if any, of these Yorkshire schoolmasters appear to have been brought to justice, although the publication of *Nicholas Nickleby* is said to have been the means of closing more than one of the schools, Shaw's included. But the money already made permitted the proprietors and their families to live in comfort, and several of their descendants occupy to-day positions of ease and independence.

It was perhaps for this reason that Dickens sought to find quite a different ending for his particular type of Yorkshire schoolmaster. Only a few more vices were necessary to complete the picture, and these were soon forthcoming.

After the thrashing so justly administered by Nicholas Squeers duly reported the matter to his uncle, through a letter written by his daughter, Fanny. Smike was befriended by Nicholas, and spent several weeks with Mr.

Vincent Crummles's Company at the Portsmouth Theatre, and then both returned to London, where Smike was recognised by Squeers (then on one of his periodical visits to obtain new pupils) and forcibly abducted and imprisoned in the house of Snawley.

Thinking to strike a blow at his Nephew, Ralph assisted Squeers in his plot against Smike. They trumped up a claim that Smike was the long lost son of Snawley and on those grounds kept him prisoner; but he was eventually released by the aid of John Browdie.

Smike was in reality the son of Ralph Nickleby, who quite in ignorance of this still plotted against him, in order to revenge himself on Nicholas. Smike, who had never really recovered from the injuries caused him during his neglected childhood at Dotheboys, died, in spite of the care bestowed on him by Nicholas, his mother and his sister.

The machinations of Ralph Nickleby were not confined to the persecution of his brother's family, and in one of them Squeers became involved; and he was arrested in the act of attempting to destroy stolen documents which led to a trial and sentence of transportation. Thus Dotheboys Hall broke up for ever!



CHAPTER ELEVEN

QUILP AND THE BRASSES

I

THE MIS-SHAPEN DWARF

THE saving grace of humour was strong in the case of Quilp, the ugly, mis-shapen dwarf in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, who frightened Little Nell with his impish pranks and horrible contortion of features, to say nothing of his protestations of love, and his vows to make her his "number two" when his own charming little wife should be dead. Indeed, he is altogether a fantastic figure with an overwhelming love of cruelty and wickedness, yet his acts of cruelty and wickedness are so bizarre as to leave no nauseating effect; on the contrary, they never fail to raise a smile. A great humorist was Mr. Quilp, of Tower Hill, in spite of his ungodly shape and unholy actions: truly a curious compound of cruelty and comedy.

'An elderly man of remarkably hard features and forbidding aspect, and so low in stature as to be quite a dwarf, though his head and face were large enough for the body of a giant.

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His black eyes were restless, sly, and cunning; his mouth and chin, bristly with the stubble of a coarse hard beard; and his complexion was one of that kind which never looks clean or wholesome. But what added most to the grotesque expression of his face, was a ghastly smile, which, appearing to be the mere result of habit and to have no connection with any mirthful or complacent feeling, constantly revealed the few discoloured fangs that were yet scattered in his mouth, and gave him the aspect of a panting dog. His dress consisted of a large high-crowned hat, a worn dark suit, a pair of capacious shoes, and a dirty white neckerchief sufficiently limp and crumpled to disclose the greater portion of his wiry throat. Such hair as he had, was of a grizzled black, cut short and straight upon his temples, and hanging in a frowzy fringe about his ears. His hands, which were of a rough coarse grain, were very dirty; his finger-nails were crooked, long and yellow.'

That he was "an uglier dwarf than could be seen anywhere for a penny", to use the words of Kit, is at once apparent. But Quilp must not be regarded as an exaggeration: such monstrosities were much commoner in the past than now. There was one such, Owen Farrel, of whom it is said that "children were frightened, and dogs snarled at him in the streets." There were no welfare centres in those days to make a straight nation of the people, and such distortions as Quilp were not infrequently to be met. As grotesque as was his figure, his actions were even more so. 'He ate hard eggs, shell and all, devoured gigantic pawns with the heads and tails on, chewed tobacco and water-cresses at the same time and with extraordinary greediness, drank boiling tea without winking, bit his fork and spoon till they bent again.'

Boiling tea was by no means his only beverage: raw spirits, sometimes boiling hot, were his particular delight. We recall the occasion when having heated some rum in a little saucepan he "raised the hot saucepan to his lips, and deliberately drank off all the spirit it contained, which might have been in quantity about half a pint, and had been but a moment before, when he took it off the fire, bubbling and hissing fiercely."

' "Have a drop yourself—a nice drop—a good, warm, fiery drop," he said to Sampson Brass. "Why, Sir," replied

Brass, "if there was such a thing as a mouthful of water that could be got without trouble—"

"There's no such thing to be had here," cried the dwarf. "Water for lawyers! Melted lead and brimstone, you mean, nice hot blistering pitch and tar—that's the thing for them". . .

The wretched Sampson took a few short sips of the liquor, which immediately distilled itself into burning tears, and in that form came rolling down his cheeks into the pipkin again, turning the colour of his face and eyelids to a deep red, and giving rise to a violent fit of coughing, in the midst of which he was still heard to declare, with the constancy of a martyr, that it was "beautiful indeed!" While he was yet in unspeakable agonies, the dwarf renewed their conversation.'

Another expression of his character which was akin to energy personified may be gathered from the description of his encounter with his dog at the Wharf. Quilp was in great ecstasy at the success of one of his fiendish plots, and was capering about the yard in a frenzy of delight, when he met with a disagreeable check, for

'Rolling very near a broken dog-kennel, there leapt forth a large fierce dog, who, but that his chain was of the shortest, would have given him a disagreeable salute. As it was, the dwarf remained upon his back in perfect safety, taunting the dog with hideous faces, and triumphing over him in his inability to advance another inch, though there were not a couple of feet between him.

"Why don't you come and bite, why don't you come and tear me to pieces, you coward?" said Quilp, hissing and worrying the animal till he was nearly mad. "You're afraid, you bully, you're afraid, you know you are."

The dog tore and strained at his chain with starting eyes and furious bark, but there the dwarf lay, snapping his fingers with gestures of defiance and contempt. When he had sufficiently recovered from his delight, he rose, and with his arms a-kimbo, achieved a kind of demon-dance round the kennel, just within the limits of the chain, driving the dog quite wild.'

The only living thing which dared to stand up against Quilp was Tom Scott—his boy at the Wharf.

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'Between this boy and the dwarf there existed a strange kind of mutual liking. How born or bred, or how nourished upon blows and threats on one side, and retorts and defiance on the other, is not to the purpose. Quilp would certainly suffer nobody to contradict him but the boy, and the boy would assuredly not have submitted to be so knocked about by anybody but Quilp, when he had the power to run away at any time he chose.'

On arriving at the Wharf one morning, the first object that presented itself to Quilp's view was

'A pair of very imperfectly shod feet elevated in the air with the soles upwards, which remarkable appearance was referable to the boy, who being of an eccentric spirit and having a natural taste for tumbling, was now standing on his head and contemplating the aspect of the river under these uncommon circumstances. He was speedily brought on his heels by the sound of his master's voice, and as soon as his head was in its right position, Mr. Quilp, to speak expressively in the absence of a better verb, "punched it" for him.

"Come, you let me alone," said the boy, parrying Quilp's hand with both his elbows alternately. "You'll get something you won't like if you don't, and so I tell you."

"You dog," snarled Quilp, "I'll beat you with an iron rod, I'll scratch you with a rusty nail, I'll pinch your eyes, if you talk to me. I will!"

With these threats he clenched his hand again, and dexterously diving in between the elbows and catching the boy's head as it dodged from side to side, gave it three or four good hard knocks. Having now carried his point and insisted on it, he left off.

"You won't do it again," said the boy, nodding his head and drawing back, with the elbows ready in case of the worst; "now!"

"Stand still, you dog," said Quilp. "I won't do it again, because I've done it as often as I want. Here. Take the key."

"Why don't you hit one of your size?" said the boy, approaching very slowly.

"Where is there one of my size, you dog?" returned Quilp. "Take the key, or I'll brain you with it." Indeed

he gave him a smart tap with the handle as he spoke. "Now, open the counting-house."

The boy sulkily complied, muttering at first, but desisting when he looked round and saw that Quilp was following him with a steady look. . . .

"Now," said Quilp, passing into the wooden counting-house, "you mind the wharf. Stand upon your head again, and I'll cut one of your feet off."

The boy made no answer, but directly Quilp had shut himself in, stood on his head before the door, then walked on his hands to the back and stood on his head there, and then to the opposite side and repeated the performance.

II

MRS. QUILP

Over nobody had Quilp such complete ascendancy as Mrs. Quilp herself—"a pretty little, mild-spoken, blue-eyed woman, who having allied herself in wedlock to the dwarf in one of those strange infatuations of which examples are by no means scarce, performed a sound practical penance for her folly, every day of her life."

Here is an example of one of their "loving" conversations following a tea party given by Mrs. Quilp to her mother and some other ladies of the Tower Hill district.

"Oh you nice creature!" smacking his lips as if this were no figure of speech, and she were actually a sweetmeat. "Oh you precious darling! oh you de-licious charmer!"

Mrs. Quilp sobbed; and knowing the nature of her pleasant lord, appeared quite as much alarmed by these compliments, as she would have been by the most extreme demonstrations of violence.

"She's such," said the dwarf, with a ghastly grin,— "such a jewel, such a diamond, such a pearl, such a ruby, such a golden casket set with gems of all sorts! She's such a treasure! I'm so fond of her!"

The poor little woman shivered from head to foot; and raising her eyes to his face with an imploring look, suffered them to droop again, and sobbed once more.

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“The best of her is,” said the dwarf, advancing with a sort of skip, which, what with the crookedness of his legs, the ugliness of his face, and the mockery of his manner, was perfectly goblin-like; “the best of her is that she’s so meek, and she’s so mild, and she never has a will of her own. . . .”

“Am I nice to look at? Should I be the handsomest creature in the world if I had but whiskers? Am I quite a lady’s man as it is?—am I, Mrs. Quilp?”

Mrs. Quilp dutifully replied, “Yes, Quilp;” and fascinated by his gaze, remained looking timidly at him, while he treated her with a succession of such horrible grimaces, as none but himself and nightmares had the power of assuming. . . .

Instead of pursuing the theme he had in his mind, Quilp rose, folded his arms again, and looked at her more sternly than before, while she averted her eyes and kept them on the ground.

“Mrs. Quilp.”

“Yes, Quilp.”

“If ever you listen to these beldames again, I’ll bite you.”

With this laconic threat, which he accompanied with a snarl that gave him the appearance of being particularly in earnest, Mr. Quilp bade her clear the teaboard away, and bring the rum.’

III

THE BRASSES

This undersized fiend had for his accomplices, a lawyer and his sister, of “the melodious name of Brass,” a couple of unmitigated scoundrels. The brother, Sampson, especially was “quite a creature of Mr. Quilp’s and had a thousand reasons for conciliating his good opinion.”

He was “a gentleman by Act of Parliament” and “a solicitor of the high court”, yet “of no very good repute” and lived in “Bevis Marks in the city of London . . .”

‘A tall meagre man, with a nose like a wen, a protruding forehead, retreating eyes, and hair of a deep red. He wore a long black surtout reaching nearly to his ankles,

short black trousers, high shoes, and cotton stockings of a bluish grey. He had a cringing manner, but a very harsh voice; and his blandest smiles were so extremely forbidding, that to have had his company under the least repulsive circumstances, one would have wished him to be out of temper that he might only scowl.”

His sister, Sally, was “thirty-five or thereabouts”, and a veritable Amazon, of a strong and vigorous turn, having “from her earliest youth devoted herself to the study of the law”. She is described as “a gaunt and bony figure, and a resolute bearing,” carrying on her upper lip “certain reddish demonstrations, which, if the imagination had been assisted by her attire, might have been mistaken for a beard. These were, however, in all probability, nothing more than eyelashes in a wrong place, as the eyes of Miss Brass were quite free from any such natural impertinences.”

There was nothing womanly about Sally Brass: she may well be said to have been of neuter sex! Her appearance was such “which if it repressed the softer emotions of love, and kept admirers at a distance, certainly inspired a feeling akin to awe in the breasts of those male strangers who had the happiness to approach her”

Dick Swiveller called her “a female Dragon,” and Quilp with his usual facetiousness referred to her as “the strong arm of the Law.”

‘She could engross, fair-copy, fill up printed forms with perfect accuracy, and in short, transact any ordinary duty of the office down to pouncing a skin of parchment or mending a pen. It is difficult to understand how, possessed of these combined attractions, she should remain Miss Brass; but whether she had steeled her heart against mankind, or whether those who might have wooed and won her, were deterred by fears that, being learned in the law, she might have too near her fingers’ ends those particular statutes which regulate what are familiarly termed actions for breach, certain it is that she was still in a state of celibacy and still in daily occupation of her old stool opposite to that of her brother Sampson. And equally certain it is, by the way, that between these two stools a great many people had come to the ground.’

IV

QUILP'S LITTLE JOKE

There is an amusing episode in the life of Quilp and his two rascally associates, that must not be omitted from this account of their doings. Quilp had absented himself from home so long on one occasion, that his wife, her mother and friends thought he must be dead, and called in Sampson Brass to advise, and to draw up a description of the missing man to be circulated in an endeavour to trace him. The monster, however, turned up just at the moment when the solemn conclave was setting, and concealed himself as was his wont on such occasions and overheard the whole of the conversation:

“Ah!” said Mr. Brass, breaking the silence, and raising his eyes to the ceiling with a sigh, “who knows but he may be looking down upon us now! Who knows but he may be surveying of us from—from somewheres or another, and contemplating us with a watchful eye! Oh Lor!”

Here Mr. Brass stopped to drink half his punch, and then resumed; looking at the other half, as he spoke, with a dejected smile.

“I can almost fancy,” said the lawyer, shaking his head, “that I see his eye glistening down at the very bottom of my liquor. When shall we look upon his like again? Never, never! One minute we are here”—holding his tumbler before his eyes—“the next we are there”—gulping down its contents, and striking himself emphatically a little below the chest—“in the silent tomb. To think that I should be drinking his very rum! It seems like a dream.”

“With regard to the descriptive advertisement,” said Sampson Brass, taking up his pen. “It is a melancholy pleasure to recall his traits. Respecting his legs now—?”

“Crooked, certainly,” said Mrs. Jiniwin.

“Do you think they *were* crooked?” said Brass, in an insinuating tone. “I think I see them now coming up the street very wide apart, in nankeen pantaloons a little shrunk and without straps. Ah! what a vale of tears we live in. Do we say crooked?”

“I think they were a little so,” observed Mrs. Quilp with a sob.

"Legs crooked," said Brass, writing as he spoke. "Large head, short body, legs crooked—"

"Very crooked," suggested Mrs. Jiniwin.

"We'll not say very crooked, ma'am," said Brass piously. "Let us not bear upon the weaknesses of the deceased. He is gone, ma'am, to where his legs will never come in question.—We will content ourselves with crooked, Mrs. Jiniwin."

"This is an occupation," said the lawyer, laying down his pen and emptying his glass, "which seems to bring him before my eyes like the Ghost of Hamlet's father, in the very clothes that he wore on work-a-days. His coat, his waistcoat, his shoes and stockings, his trousers, his hat, his wit and humour, his pathos and his umbrella, all come before me like visions of my youth. His linen!" said Mr. Brass, smiling fondly at the wall, "his linen which was always of a particular colour, for such was his whim and fancy—how plain I see his linen now!"

"You had better go on, Sir," said Mrs. Jiniwin impatiently.

"True, ma'am, true," cried Mr. Brass. "Our faculties must not freeze with grief. I'll trouble you for a little more of that, ma'am. A question now arises, with relation to his nose."

"Flat," said Mrs. Jiniwin.

"Aquiline!" said Quilp, thrusting in his head, and striking the feature with his fist. "Aquiline, you hag. Do you see it? Do you call this flat? Do you? Eh?"

"Oh capital, capital!" shouted Brass, from the mere force of habit. "Excellent! How very good he is! He's a most remarkable man—so extremely whimsical! Such an amazing power of taking people by surprise!"

Quilp paid no regard whatever to these compliments, nor to the dubious and frightened look into which the lawyer gradually subsided, nor to the shrieks of his wife and mother-in-law, nor to the latter's running from the room, nor to the former's fainting away. Keeping his eye fixed on Sampson Brass, he walked up to the table, and beginning with his glass, drank off the contents, and went regularly round until he had emptied the other two, when he seized the case-bottle, and hugging it under his arm, surveyed him with a most extraordinary leer.

"Not yet, Sampson," said Quilp. "Not just yet!"

“Oh very good indeed!” cried Brass, recovering his spirits a little. “Ha, ha, ha! Oh exceedingly good! There’s not another man alive who could carry it off like that. A most difficult position to carry off. But he has such a flow of good-humour, such an amazing flow!”

“Good night,” said the dwarf, nodding expressively.

“Good night, Sir, good night,” cried the lawyer, retreating backwards towards the door. “This is a joyful occasion indeed, extremely joyful. Ha ha ha! oh very rich, very rich indeed, remarkably so!”

V

THE PLOT

Quilp’s persecution of Little Nell’s grandfather, whom he had turned out of house for the non-payment of a debt, ended in their running away, and thus upsetting the plans Quilp had made for marrying Nell to Dick Swiveller.

The attitude of chivalry shown by Kit towards Little Nell and the assistance given by him to the old man’s brother, with a view to tracing the fugitives incensed Quilp to such a degree that he devised a plot that would secure Kit’s arrest, and this was the manner of it.

““Business,” said the dwarf, glancing from brother to sister. “Very private business. Lay your heads together when you’re by yourselves.”

“Certainly, Sir,” returned Brass, taking out his pocket-book and pencil. “I’ll take down the heads if you please, Sir. Remarkable documents,” added the lawyer, raising his eyes to the ceiling, “most remarkable documents. He states his points so clearly that it’s a treat to have ’em! I don’t know any act of parliament that’s equal to him in clearness.”

“I shall deprive you of a treat,” said Quilp. “Put up your book. We don’t want any documents. So. There’s a lad named Kit—”

Miss Sally nodded, implying that she knew of him. . . .

“This Kit is one of your honest people; one of your fair characters; a prowling prying hound; a hypocrite; a double-faced, white-livered, sneaking spy; a crouching



Daniel Quilp and Sampson Brass

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cur to those that feed and coax him, and a barking yelping dog to all besides."

"Fearfully eloquent!" cried Brass with a sneeze. "Quite appalling!"

"Come to the point," said Miss Sally, "and don't talk so much."

"Right again!" exclaimed Quilp, with another contemptuous look at Sampson, "always foremost! I say, Sally, he is a yelping, insolent dog to all besides, and most of all, to me. In short, I owe him a grudge."

"That's enough, Sir," said Sampson.

"No, it's not enough, Sir," sneered Quilp; "will you hear me out? Besides that I owe him a grudge on that account, he thwarts me at this minute, and stands between me and an end which might otherwise prove a golden one to us all. Apart from that, I repeat that he crosses my humour, and I hate him. Now, you know the lad, and can guess the rest. Devise your own means of putting him out of my way, and execute them. Shall it be done?"

"It shall, Sir," said Sampson.

"Then give me your hand" retorted Quilp. "Sally, girl, yours. I rely as much, or more, on you than him. Tom Scott comes back. Lantern, pipes, more grog, and a jolly night of it!"

No other word was spoken, no other look exchanged, which had the slightest reference to this, the real occasion of their meeting. The trio were well accustomed to act together, and were linked to each other by ties of mutual interest and advantage, and nothing more was needed. Resuming his boisterous manner with the same ease with which he had thrown it off, Quilp was in an instant the same uproarious, reckless little savage he had been a few seconds before.'

VI

UNMASKED

The plot worked to perfection; Sally gave out to their only clerk, Dick Swiveller, that various articles had been missing of late, thus leading Dick to infer that the culprit must be Kit, the only person who has been habitually left

alone in the office. Brass would not hear of this, and extolled Kit as an honest young fellow. A trap was then laid with a five pound note left on the desk, and in the absence of Dick, Brass placed the note in the hat of Kit, under the lining. On Dick's return the note was found to be missing, and it was he (Dick) who made the discovery of it in Kit's hat. For the alleged crime Kit was sentenced to be transported, but he was luckily saved at the eleventh hour by the revelations of the Marchioness, the half starved drudge of Sally Brass, who in roaming the house at night in search of broken scraps of meat to satisfy her hunger, (to use the words of Mr. Witherden, the lawyer, in revealing to Sally, his knowledge of the plot) overheard

“that conference which you and Mr. Brass held together, on the night before that most unfortunate and innocent young man was accused of robbery, by a horrible device of which I will only say that it may be characterised by the epithets which you have applied to this wretched little witness, and by a few stronger ones besides.”

Mr. Witherden desired to wring from Sally by these means a full confession of her guilt and the name of her accomplices.

“You have the honour of being sister to one of the greatest scoundrels unhung; and, if I may venture to say so to a lady, you are in every respect quite worthy of him. But, connected with you two is a third party, a villain of the name of Quilp, the prime mover of the whole diabolical device, who, I believe to be worse than either. For his sake, Miss Brass, do us the favour to reveal the whole history of this affair. Let me remind you that your doing so, at our instance, will place you in a safe and comfortable position—your present one is not desirable—and cannot injure your brother; for against him and you we have quite sufficient evidence (as you hear) already.”

Sally would have held firm, but her brother was made of no such stuff as she; he had followed her to the lawyer's, and since then had been listening; and wishing at this juncture to save his skin, and revenge himself on Quilp who had lately been extremely brutal in his behaviour, he

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presents himself, and, pointing to his bruises and scratches says he owes all these to Quilp.

““Quilp, who deludes me into his infernal den, and takes a delight in looking on and chuckling while I scorch, and burn, and bruise, and maim myself—Quilp, who never once, no, never once, in all our communications together, has treated me otherwise than as a dog—Quilp, whom I have always hated with my whole heart, but never so much as lately. He gives me the cold shoulder on this very matter as if he had had nothing to do with it, instead of being the first to propose it. I can't trust him. In one of his howling, raving, blazing humours, I believe he'd let it out, if it was murder, and never think of himself so long as he could terrify me. Now,” said Brass, picking up his hat again and replacing the shade over his eye, and actually crouching down, in the excess of his servility. . . .

“To be short with you, then, it leads me to this. If the truth has come out, as it plainly has in a manner that there's no standing up against—and a very sublime and grand thing is Truth, gentlemen, in its way, though like other sublime and grand things, such as thunderstorms and that, we're not always over and above glad to see it—I had better turn upon this man than let this man turn upon me. It's clear to me that I am done for. Therefore, if anybody is to split, I had better be the person and have the advantage of it. Sarah, my dear, comparatively speaking you're safe. I relate these circumstances for my own profit.”

With that, Mr. Brass, in a great hurry, revealed the whole story; bearing as heavily as possible on his amiable employer, and making himself out to be rather a saint-like and holy character, though subject—he acknowledged—to human weaknesses. He concluded thus:

“Now, gentlemen, I am not a man who does things by halves. Being in for a penny, I am ready, as the saying is, to be in for a pound. You must do with me what you please, and take me where you please. If you wish to have this in writing, we'll reduce it into manuscript immediately. You will be tender with me, I am sure. I am quite confident you will be tender with me. . . . I yielded from necessity to Quilp, for though necessity has no law, she has her lawyers. I yield to you from necessity too; from policy besides. . . . Punish Quilp, gentlemen. Weigh

heavily upon him. Grind him down. Tread him under foot. He had done as much by me, for many and many a day.”

Sally with a sneer, summed up her brother's character in a few well chosen words:

“And this is my brother, that I have worked and toiled for, and believed to have had something of the man in him. . . . You pitiful dastard . . . You feared that I should be beforehand with you. But do you think that I would have been enticed to say a word? I'd have scorned it, if they had tried and tempted me for twenty years!”

But Sampson, mean to the last, would not admit any such laudable action. “Always suspect everybody,” was his maxim. “If you were not actually about to purchase your own safety when I showed myself, I suspect you'd have done it by this time,” was his only rejoinder. “The shame, gentlemen,” added Brass, allowing himself to be slightly overcome, “if there is any, is mine. It's better that a female should be spared it.” . . .

Having delivered himself of this beautiful sentiment, Sampson proceeded to write the required confession.

But what of the “lovely Sarah”: she paced up and down the room in her agitation—and then fell asleep on a chair near the door, and presently in the half light of the afternoon, either took “an intentional and waking departure, or a somnambulistic leave-taking,” but “in whatever state she walked away, she certainly did not walk back again.”

Staunch and true was Sally; she warned Quilp of his danger in an expressive letter, which poor Mrs. Quilp delivered to her lord and master at his “Castle.”

“Sammy has been practised upon and has broken confidence,” she wrote. “It has all come out. You had better not be in the way, for strangers are going to call on you.” . . . Don't lose time. I didn't. I am not to be found anywhere. If I was you, I wouldn't be either.”

VII

THE DEATH OF QUILP

‘By a great exertion of strength, he closed the two old gates, which were deeply sunken in the mud, and barred them with a heavy beam. That done, he shook his matted hair from about his eyes, and dried them.—Strong and fast.

“The fence between this wharf and the next is easily climbed,” said the dwarf, when he had taken these precautions. “There’s a back lane, too, from there. That shall be my way out. A man need know his road well, to find it in this lovely place to-night. I need fear no unwelcome visitors while this lasts, I think.” . . .

While he was collecting a few necessaries and cramming them into his pockets, he never once ceased communing with himself in a low voice, or unclenched his teeth: which he had ground together on finishing Miss Brass’s note.

“Oh Sampson!” he muttered, “good worthy creature—if I could but hug you! If I could only fold you in my arms, and squeeze your ribs, as I *could* squeeze them if I once had you tight—what a meeting there would be between us! If we ever do cross each other again, Sampson, we’ll have a greeting not easily to be forgotten, trust me. This time, Sampson, this moment when all had gone on so well, was no nicely chosen! It was so thoughtful of you, so penitent, so good. Oh, if we were face to face in this room again, my white-livered man of law, how well contented one of us would be!”

There he stopped; and raising the bowl of punch to his lips, drank a long deep draught, as if it were fair water and cooling to his parched mouth. Setting it down abruptly, and resuming his preparations, he went on with his soliloquy.

“There’s Sally,” he said, with flashing eyes; “the woman has spirit, determination, purpose—was she asleep, or petrified? She could have stabbed him—poisoned him safely. She might have seen this coming on. Why does she give me notice when it’s too late? When he sat there, —yonder there, over there,—with his white face, and red head, and sickly smile, why didn’t I know what was passing in his heart? It should have stopped beating, that night,

if I had been in his secret, or there are no drugs to lull a man to sleep, or no fire to burn him!"

Another draught from the bowl; and, cowering over the fire with a ferocious aspect, he muttered to himself again, . . . "What's that?"

A knocking at the gate he had closed. A loud and violent knocking. . . .

"So soon!" said the dwarf. "And so eager! I am afraid I shall disappoint you. It's well I'm quite prepared. Sally, I thank you!"

As he spoke, he extinguished the candle. In his impetuous attempts to subdue the brightness of the fire, he upset the stove, which came tumbling forward, and fell with a crash upon the burning embers it had shot forth in its descent, leaving the room in pitchy darkness. The noise at the gate still continuing, he felt his way to the door, and stepped into the open air.

At that moment the knocking ceased. It was about eight o'clock; but the dead of the darkest night would have been as noon-day in comparison with the thick cloud which then rested upon the earth, and shrouded everything from view. He darted forward for a few paces, as if into the mouth of some dim, yawning cavern; then, thinking he had gone wrong, changed the direction of his steps; then, stood still, not knowing where to turn.

"If they would knock again," said Quilp, trying to peer into the gloom by which he was surrounded, "the sound might guide me! Come! Batter the gate once more!"

He stood listening intently, but the noise was not renewed. Nothing was to be heard in that deserted place, but, at intervals, the distant barkings of dogs. . . .

"If I could find a wall or fence," said the dwarf, stretching out his arms, and walking slowly on, "I should know which way to turn. A good, black, devil's night this, to have my dear friend here! If I had but that wish, it might; for anything I cared, never be day again."

As the word passed his lips, he staggered and fell—and next moment was fighting with the cold dark water!

For all its bubbling up and rushing in his ears, he could hear the knocking at the gate again—could hear a shout that followed it—could recognise the voice. . . . He answered the shout—with a yell, which seemed to make the hundred fires that danced before his eyes tremble and flicker, as if a gust of wind had stirred them. It was of no avail.

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The strong tide filled his throat, and bore him on, upon its rapid current . . . a corpse.

It toyed and sported with its ghastly freight . . . until, tired of the ugly plaything, it flung it on a swamp—a dismal place where pirates had swung in chains, through many a wintry night—and left it there to bleach.’

Such was the fitting end of Quilp: such was the manner in which this misbegotten monster of the Thames-side was returned to its native slime!

VIII

THE END OF THE BRASSES

Sampson Brass was sentenced for a term of years to “reside in a spacious mansion where several other gentlemen were lodged and boarded at the public charge, who went clad in a sober uniform of grey turned up with yellow, had their hair cut extremely short, and chiefly lived on gruel and light soup. It was also required of him that he should partake of their exercise of constantly ascending an endless flight of stairs; and lest his legs, unused to such exertion, should be weakened by it, that he should wear upon one ankle an amulet or charm of iron.” . . .

‘Of Sally Brass, conflicting rumours went abroad. Some said with confidence that she had gone down to the docks in male attire, and had become a female sailor; others darkly whispered that she had enlisted as a private in the second regiment of Foot Guards, and had been seen in uniform, and on duty, to wit, leaning on her musket and looking out of a sentry-box in St. James’s Park, one evening. There were many such whispers as these in circulation; but the truth appears to be that, after the lapse of some five years two wretched people were more than once observed to crawl at dusk from the inmost recesses of St. Giles’s, and to take their way along the streets, with shuffling steps and cowering shivering forms, looking into the roads and kennels as they went in search of refuse food or disregarded offal. These forms were never beheld but in those nights of cold and gloom, when the terrible spectres, who lie at all other times in the obscene hiding-places of London, in archways, dark

vaults and cellars, venture to creep into the streets; the embodied spirits of Disease, and Vice, and Famine. It was whispered by those who should have known, that these were Sampson and his sister Sally; and to this day, it is said, they sometimes pass, on bad nights, in the same loathsome guise, close at the elbow of the shrinking passenger.'



The one and only Mrs. Jarley

CHAPTER TWELVE

BELOVED VAGABONDS

I

THE ONE AND ONLY MRS. JARLEY

IN the chapter devoted to the "Kings of the Road" we have already concerned ourselves with the real type of vagabonds who, whilst not always being exactly lovable, are not exactly rogues either. But still they possess our hearts, and claim our interest as they did the heart and interest of Dickens.

There are, however, in his pages a few really lovable vagabonds; who more so than the "Christian lady, stout and comfortable to look upon who wore a large bonnet trembling with roses", who wandered up and down the fair English countryside in "a smart little house upon wheels, with white dimity curtains festooning the windows, and window-shutters of green picked out with panels of a staring red, in which happily-contrasted colours the whole concern shone brilliant."

Such an enticing picture this, that we must take a peep inside this fairy travelling palace, and see that

'One half of it—that moiety in which the comfortable proprietress was then seated—was carpeted, and so partitioned off at the further end as to accommodate a sleeping-place, constructed after the fashion of a berth on board ship, which was shaded, like the little windows, with fair white curtains, and looked comfortable enough, though by what kind of gymnastic exercise the lady of the caravan ever contrived to get into it, was an unfathomable mystery. The other half served for a kitchen, and was fitted up with a stove whose small chimney passed through the roof. It held also a closet or larder, several chests, a great pitcher of water, and a few cooking utensils and articles of crockery. These latter necessaries hung upon the walls, which, in that portion

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of the establishment devoted to the lady of the caravan, were ornamented with such gayer and lighter decorations as a triangle and a couple of well-thumbed tambourines.'

Such a travelling van did Little Nell encounter on her wanderings with her grandfather; it was a striking contrast to the Punch and Judy show she had only lately left.

Even the free road has its limitations in show folk society, for when Nell, not unnaturally, asked the lady if she knew them, the question brought forth the indignant outburst:

"Know 'em, child! Know *them!* But you're young and inexperienced, and that's your excuse for asking sich a question. Do I look as if I know'd 'em, does the caravan look as if *it* know'd 'em?"

Then the lady brought out from a corner of the caravan

'A large roll of canvas about a yard in width, which she laid upon the floor and spread open with her foot until it nearly reached from one end of the caravan to the other.

"There, child," she said, "read that."

Nell walked down it, and read aloud, in enormous black letters, the inscription, "JARLEY'S WAXWORK."

"Read it again," said the lady, complacently.

"Jarley's Waxwork," repeated Nell.

"That's me," said the lady. "I am Mrs. Jarley."

And what a world-famed personage is this Mrs. Jarley! more famous than the real Madame Tussaud herself, because all the great human and lovable qualities of Mrs. Jarley have been revealed to us, and we know really so little about the other, although she was a living personality.

Nell had never seen a waxwork before and had the temerity to inquire if it was funnier than Punch.

"Funnier!" said Mrs. Jarley in a shrill voice. "It is not funny at all."

"Oh!" said Nell, with all possible humility.

"It isn't funny at all," repeated Mrs. Jarley. "It's calm and—what's that word again—critical?—no—classical, that's it—it is calm and classical. No low beatings and

knockings about, no jokings and squeakings like your precious Punches, but always the same, with a constantly unchanging air of coldness and gentility; and so like life, that if waxwork only spoke and walked about, you'd hardly know the difference. I won't go so far as to say, that, as it is, I've seen waxwork quite like life, but I've certainly seen some life that was exactly like waxwork."

II

LITTLE NELL SHOWS THE WAXWORK

These were the words in which Mrs. Jarley proposed that Little Nell should stay with her and help to show the figures to the public.

"It's not a common offer, bear in mind," said the lady, rising into the tone and manner in which she was accustomed to address her audiences; "it's Jarley's waxwork, remember. The duty's very light and genteel, the company particularly select, the exhibition takes place in assembly-rooms, town-halls, large rooms at inns, or auction galleries. There is none of your open-air wagrancy at Jarley's, recollect; there is no tarpaulin and sawdust at Jarley's, remember. Every expectation held out in the handbills is realised to the utmost, and the whole forms an effect of imposing brilliancy hitherto unrivalled in this kingdom. Remember that the price of admission is only sixpence, and that this is an opportunity which may never occur again!"

* * * * *

Mrs. Jarley ordered the room to be cleared of all but herself and the child, and, sitting herself down in an armchair in the centre, formally invested Nell with a willow wand, long used by herself for pointing out the characters, and was at great pains to instruct her in her duty.

"That," said Mrs. Jarley in her exhibition tone, as Nell touched a figure at the beginning of the platform, "is an unfortunate Maid of Honour in the Time of Queen Elizabeth, who died from pricking her finger in consequence of working upon a Sunday. Observe the blood which is trickling

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from her finger; also the gold-eyed needle of the period, with which she is at work."

All this, Nell repeated twice or thrice: pointing to the finger and the needle at the right times: and then passed on to the next.

"That, ladies and gentlemen," said Mrs. Jarley, "is Jasper Packlemerton of atrocious memory, who courted and married fourteen wives, and destroyed them all, by tickling the soles of their feet when they were sleeping in the consciousness of innocence and virtue. On being brought to the scaffold and asked if he was sorry for what he had done, he replied yes, he was sorry for having let 'em off so easy, and hoped all Christian husbands would pardon him the offence. Let this be a warning to all young ladies to be particular in the character of the gentlemen of their choice. Observe that his fingers are curled as if in the act of tickling, and that his face is represented with a wink, as he appeared when committing his barbarous murders."

When Nell knew all about Mr. Packlemerton, and could say it without faltering, Mrs. Jarley passed on to the fat man, and then to the thin man, the tall man, the short man, the old lady who died of dancing at a hundred and thirty-two, the wild boy of the woods, the woman who poisoned fourteen families with pickled walnuts, and other historical characters and interesting but misguided individuals. And so well did Nell profit by her instructions, and so apt was she to remember them, that by the time they had been shut up together for a couple of hours she was in full possession of the history of the whole establishment, and perfectly competent to the enlightenment of visitors.

Mrs. Jarley was not slow to express her admiration at this happy result, and carried her young friend and pupil to inspect the remaining arrangements within doors, by virtue of which the passage had been already converted into a grove of green baize hung with the inscription she had already seen (Mr. Slum's productions), and a highly ornamented table placed at the upper end for Mrs. Jarley herself, at which she was to preside and take the money, in company with his Majesty King George the Third, Mr. Grimaldi as clown, Mary Queen of Scots, an anonymous gentleman of the Quaker persuasion, and Mr. Pitt holding in his hand a correct model of the bill for the imposition of the window duty. The preparations without doors

had not been neglected either; a nun of great personal attractions was telling her beads on the little portico over the door; and a brigand with the blackest possible head of hair, and the clearest possible complexion, was at that moment going round the town in a cart, consulting the miniature of a 'lady.'

III

A GREAT SHOW-WOMAN

A great show-woman was Mrs. Jarley. In addition to the poetic effusions of Mr. Slum, and the parade round of town of Nell and the Brigand, in the light cart, Mrs. Jarley had other devices "to stimulate the popular taste, and whet the popular curiosity . . . two carters constantly passed in and out of the exhibition-room, under various disguises, protesting aloud that the sight was better worth the money than anything they had beheld in all their lives, and urging the bystanders, with tears in their eyes, not to neglect such a brilliant gratification."

Then when she considered she was making Nell "too cheap" by exhibiting her in the tour round, she

'sent the Brigand out alone again, and kept her in the exhibition room, where she described the figures every half-hour to the great satisfaction of admiring audiences. And these audiences were of a very superior description, including a great many young ladies' boarding-schools, whose favour Mrs. Jarley had been at great pains to conciliate, by altering the face and costume of Mr. Grimaldi as clown to represent Mr. Lindley Murray as he appeared when engaged in the composition of his English Grammar, and turning a murderess of great renown into Mrs. Hannah More—both of which likenesses were admitted by Miss Monflathers, who was at the head of the head Boarding and Day Establishment in the town, and who condescended to take a Private View with eight chosen young ladies, to be quite startling from their extreme correctness. Mr. Pitt in a nightcap and bedgown, and without his boots, represented the poet Cowper with perfect exactness; and Mary Queen of Scots in a dark wig, white shirt-collar, and male

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attire, was such a complete image of Lord Byron that the young ladies quite screamed when they saw it.'

Our final view is of

'Mrs. Jarley in the pay-place, chinking silver moneys from noon till night, and solemnly calling upon the crowd to take notice that the price of admission was only sixpence, and that the departure of the whole collection, on a short tour among the Crowned Heads of Europe, was positively fixed for that day week.

"So be in time, be in time, be in time," said Mrs. Jarley at the close of every such address. "Remember that this is Jarley's stupendous collection of upwards of One Hundred Figures, and that it is the only collection in the world; all others being impostors and deceptions. Be in time, be in time, be in time!"'

IV

DOCTOR MARIGOLD



It was a whimsicality peculiarly his own that prompted Dickens to christen one of his happiest vagabond creations "doctor" Marigold. No dispenser of medicines was this Doctor, but a showman; a Cheap Jack in fact, and he tells in his own breezy patter, redolent of the foot-board of the showman's van, how he came to receive that name. There can hardly be a doubt but that his father "William Marigold" had an eye for a good and cheap advertisement, just as did the sponsors of "Lord" George Sanger in later years.

'I was born on the Queen's highway, but it was the King's at that time. A doctor was fetched to my own mother by my own father, when it took place in a common; and in consequence of his being a very kind gentleman, and accepting no fee but a tea-tray, I was named Doctor, out of gratitude and compliment to him. There you have me. Doctor Marigold.

I am at present a middle-aged man of a broadish build, in cords, leggings, and a sleeved waistcoat the strings of which is always gone behind. Repair them how you will, they go like fiddle-strings. You have been to the theatre, and you have seen one of the violín-players screw up his violín, after listening to it as if it had been whispering the secret to him that it feared it was out of order, and then you have heard it snap. That's as exactly similar to my waistcoat as a waistcoat and a violín can be like one another.

I am partial to a white hat, and I like a shawl round my neck wore loose and easy. Sitting down is my favourite posture. If I have a taste in point of personal jewelry, it is mother-of-pearl buttons. There you have me again, as large as life.'

Rarely has a more consistent character been penned; his infant nurture being plain and unadulterated Showmanship, what was probably the most important episode in his life—his courtship—was carried on in a style befitting and at the same time reflecting his profession.

'I courted my wife from the footboard of the cart. I did indeed. She was a Suffolk young woman, and it was in Ipswich market-place right opposite the corn-chandler's shop. I had noticed her up at a window last Saturday that was, appreciating highly. I had took to her, and I had said to myself, "If not already disposed of, I'll have that lot." Next Saturday that come, I pitched the cart on the same pitch, and I was in very high feather indeed, keeping 'em laughing the whole of the time, and getting off the goods briskly. At last I took out of my waistcoat pocket a small lot wrapped in soft paper, and I put it this way (looking up at the window where she was). "Now here, my blooming English maidens, is an article, the last article of the present evening's sale, which I offer to only you, the lovely Suffolk Dumplings biling over with beauty, and I won't take a bid of a thousand pounds for from any man alive. Now what is it? Why, I'll tell you what it is. It's made of fine gold, and it's not broke, though there's a hole in the middle of it, and it's stronger than any fetter that ever was forged, though it's smaller than any finger in my set of ten. Why ten? Because, when my parents made over my property to me, I tell you true, there was twelve sheets, twelve towels, twelve table-cloths, twelve

knives, twelve forks, twelve tablespoons, and twelve teaspoons, but my set of fingers was two short of a dozen, and could never since be matched. Now what else is it? Come, I'll tell you. It's a hoop of solid gold, wrapped in a silver curl-paper that I myself took off the shining locks of the ever beautiful old lady in Threadneedle-street, London city. I wouldn't tell you so if I hadn't the paper to show, or you mightn't believe it even of me. Now what else is it? It's a man-trap and a handcuff, the parish stocks and a leg-lock, all in gold and all in one. Now what else is it? It's a wedding ring. Now I'll tell you what I'm a-going to do with it. I'm not a-going to offer this lot for money, but I mean to give it to the next of you beauties that laughs, and I'll pay her a visit to-morrow morning at exactly half after nine o'clock as the chimes go, and I'll take her out for a walk to put up the banns." *She* laughed, and got the ring handed up to her. When I called in the morning, she says, "Oh dear! It's never you and you never mean it?" "It's ever me," says I, "and I am ever yours, and I ever mean it." So we got married, after being put up three times—which, by-the-by, is quite in the Cheap Jack way again, and shows once more how the Cheap Jack customs pervade society.'

V

TEMPER IN A CART

"We might have had such a pleasant life," he reflects, in telling that "she wasn't a bad wife, but she had a temper."

'A roomy cart, with the large goods hung outside, and the bed slung underneath it when on the road, an iron pot and a kettle, a fireplace for the cold weather, a chimney for the smoke, a hanging-shelf and a cupboard, a dog and a horse. What more do you want? You draw off upon a bit of turf in a green lane or by the roadside, you hobble your old horse and turn him grazing, you light your fire upon the ashes of the last visitors, you cook your stew, and you wouldn't call the Emperor of France your father. But have a temper in the cart, flinging language and the hardest goods in stock at you, and where are you then? Put a name to your feelings.'

The worst of it was, as the Doctor himself confesses, that they had a little daughter, and when the mother "was in her furies" she beat the child unmercifully. "How could I prevent it?" he asks in all simplicity of his great good heart.

'Such a thing is not to be tried with such a temper—in a cart—without coming to a fight. It's in the natural size and formation of a cart to bring it to a fight. And then the poor child got worse terrified than before, as well as worse hurt generally, and her mother made complaints to the next people we lighted on, and the word went round, "Here's a wretch of a Cheap Jack been a beating his wife.'"

Little Sophy took the fever, turned away from her mother, and died on her Cheap Jack father's shoulder as he was selling his wares in the market place, and a short time afterwards the mother drowned herself in the river at Exeter.

The Doctor and his dog, who used to assist in the bidding, were alone in the cart now, and being lonely, as he himself explains, is sometimes accountable for actions otherwise to be scorned. In the ordinary way to be associated with people who "dress up" was beneath the notice of Doctor Marigold. But the acquaintanceship with a giant which ripened at about this time brought a great joy into the life of the lonely Cheap Jack.

His life was made a burden to him by the cruelty of his master towards a step-daughter who was deaf and dumb. Her mother was dead, and she had no living soul to take her part, and was used most hard. She travelled with his master's caravan only because there was nowhere to leave her, and this giant, otherwise Pickleson, did go so far as to believe that his master often tried to lose her.'

Doctor Marigold was not long in getting into close touch with Mim, the proprietor with whom Pickleson the giant travelled.

"She lies heavy on your own hands; what'll you take for her?" Mim was a most ferocious swearer. Suppressing that part of his reply which was much the longest part, his reply was, "A pair of braces." "Now I'll tell you," says I, "what I'm a going to do with you. I'm a going to fetch

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you half-a-dozen pair of the primest braces in the cart, and then to take her away with me." Says Mim (again ferocious), "I'll believe it when I've got the goods, and no sooner." I made all the haste I could, lest he should think twice of it, and the bargain was completed, which Pickleson he was thereby so relieved in his mind that he come out at his little back door, longways like a serpent, and give us Shivery Shakey in a whisper among the wheels at parting.'

VI

SOPHY

Those were happy days that followed, for the dear old Cheap Jack was alone no longer. He called the poor dumb girl Sophy after his own lost little one and taught her to read by many ingenious devices. She repaid his love and care in a thousand ways and it gave the Doctor such heart that he gained a greater reputation than ever in his profession, and he "put Pickleson down in his will for a fypunnote."

This happiness continued until Sophy was sixteen years of age, by which time the honest fellow began to feel he had not done his whole duty by her and that she must have a better share of learning than he was able to impart.

'So I took her hand in mine, and I went with her one day to the Deaf and Dumb establishment in London, and when the gentleman come to speak to us, I says to him: "Now I'll tell you what I'll do with you, Sir. I am nothing but a Cheap Jack, but of late years I have laid by for a rainy day notwithstanding. This is my only daughter (adopted) and you can't produce a deafer nor a dumber. Teach her the most that can be taught her in the shortest separation that can be named,—state the figure for it,—and I am game to put the money down. I won't bate you a single farthing, Sir, but I'll put down the money here and now, and I'll thankfully throw you in a pound to take it. There!"'

For two years Sophy stayed at that school and Doctor Marigold was again alone, but not lonely; for the idea of fitting up a special cart for her to be called "the Library Cart", filled with books for her to read, and with table and desk for her to write at, gave him great pleasure and helped

him over the two years' separation. The writing of his own "prescriptions" as he called them afforded him still further occupation until the time arrived for Sophy to return to him. In due time he went to the Deaf and Dumb Establishment there to find her "grown such a woman, so pretty, so intelligent, so expressive".

"You are affected," says the gentleman in a kindly manner.

"I feel, Sir," says I, "that I am but a rough chap in a sleeved waistcoat."

"I feel," says the gentleman, "that it was you who raised her from misery and degradation, and brought her into communication with her kind. But why do we converse alone together, when we can converse so well with her? Address her in your own way."

"I am such a rough chap in a sleeved waistcoat, Sir," says I, "and she is such a graceful woman, and she stands so quiet at the door!"

"Try if she moves at the old sign," says the gentleman.

They had got it up together o' purpose to please me! For when I give her the old sign, she rushed to my feet, and dropped upon her knees, holding up her hands to me with pouring tears of love and joy; and when I took her hands and lifted her, she clasped me round the neck, and lay there; and I don't know what a fool I didn't make of myself, until we all three settled down into talking without sound, as if there was a something soft and pleasant spread over the whole world for us.'

And so the old Cheap Jack "Doctor" once again had a companion for his long journeys up and down the country; but not for long; nature was bound to assert herself, especially where an attractive young lady was concerned. At the Deaf and Dumb Establishment there was a section for men also, and one of them followed the caravan about the country making love to Sophy (and she returning it) all unknown to Doctor Marigold until "Mim's Travelling giant, otherwise Pickleson" (the same who had introduced Sophy to her adopted father), discovered them and made his discovery known to Marigold. The young man was well connected, the couple dearly loved one another and, though there must have been a bitter pang in his heart, he gave Sophy her husband, joining their hands and saying to them in his

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old facetious way, "Doctor Marigold's last prescription. To be taken for life," and then he bolted.

He gave a wedding feast in the library cart, and then the happy couple went to China, where business called the husband; and the poor Cheap Jack, as he had done in days gone by, went plodding along alone, at the old horse's head, with his whip over his shoulder.

Of course there were letters to cheer him! After a time one came, reading:

"Dearest father, not a week ago I had a darling little daughter, but I am so well that they let me write these words to you. Dearest and best father, I hope my child may not be deaf and dumb, but I do not yet know."

After that, letters became irregular, the husband being moved to another station, and the Cheap Jack, also, being always on the move. Then came the happy day when the loved ones met as all who love and part must meet. It is a tear compelling piece of writing, a fitting conclusion to as typical an example of Dickens's mastery of laughter and tears as can be found in any of his work.

VII

A HAPPY CHRISTMAS MEETING

'Five years, odd months, had gone since Sophy went away. I was still the King of the Cheap Jacks, and at a greater height of popularity than ever. I had had a first-rate autumn of it, and on the twenty-third of December, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-four, I found myself at Uxbridge, Middlesex, clean sold out. So I jogged up to London with the old horse, light and easy, to have my Christmas-Eve and Christmas-Day alone by the fire in the Library Cart, and then to buy a regular new stock of goods all round, to sell 'em again and get the money.

I am a neat hand at cookery, and I'll tell you what I knocked up for my Christmas-Eve dinner in the Library Cart. I knocked up a beefsteak pudding for one, with two kidneys, a dozen oysters, and a couple of mushrooms, thrown in. It's a pudding to put a man in good humour with everything, except the two bottom buttons of his

waistcoat. Having relished that pudding and cleared away, I turned the lamp low, and sat down by the light of the fire, watching it as it shone upon the backs of Sophy's books.

Sophy's books so brought up Sophy's self, that I saw her touching face quite plainly, before I dropped off dozing by the fire. This may be a reason why Sophy, with her deaf and dumb child in her arms, seemed to stand silent by me all through my nap. I was on the road, off the road, in all sorts of places, North and South and West and East, Winds liked best and winds liked least, Here and there and gone astray, Over the hills and far away. . . .

I had started at a real sound, and the sound was on the steps of the cart. It was the light hurried tread of a child, coming clambering up, . . . the touch of a real child was laid upon the outer handle of the door, and the handle turned, and the door opened a little way, and a real child peeped in. A bright little comely girl with large dark eyes.

Looking full at me, the tiny creature took off her mite of a straw hat, and a quantity of dark curls fell all about her face. Then she opened her lips, and said in a pretty voice,

“Grandfather!”

“Ah, my God!” I cries out. “She can speak!”

“Yes, dear grandfather. And I am to ask you whether there was ever any one that I remind you of?”

In a moment Sophy was round my neck, as well as the child, and her husband was a-wringing my hand with his face hid, and we all had to shake ourselves together before we could get over it. And when we did begin to get over it, and I saw the pretty child a-talking, pleased and quick and eager and busy, to her mother, in the signs that I had first taught her mother, the happy and yet pitying tears fell rolling down my face.'

VIII

MAGSMAN'S AMUSEMENTS

Equally whimsical, and yet how entirely different is the amusing account of the dwarf showing at fairs, who won a fortune in a lottery, “went into society”—and came out of it.

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The story is a part of the history of "A House to Let". At one time the house was rented to a showman, Toby Magsman, a "grizzled personage in velveteen", and interviewed in his little house on wheels laid up for the winter in a muddy creek, he tells, in his own inimitable way, how he rented the house, and why he left it.

'The neighbours cut up rough, and made complaints; but Mr. Magsman don't know what they *would* have had. It was a lovely thing. First of all, there was the canvas, representing the picter of the Giant, in Spanish trunks and a ruff, who was himself half the heighth of the house, and was run up with a line and pulley to a pole on the roof, so that his Ed was coeval with the parapet. Then, there was the canvas, representin the picter of the Albina lady, showing her white air to the Army and Navy in correct uniform. Then, there was the canvas, representin the picter of the Wild Indian a scalpin a member of some foreign nation. Then, there was the canvas, representin the picter of a child of a British Planter, seized by two Boa Constrictors—not that *we* never had no child, nor no Constrictors neither. Similarly, there was the canvas, representin the picter of the Wild Ass of the Prairies—not that *we* never had no wild asses, nor wouldn't have had 'em at a gift. Last, there was the canvas, representin the picter of the Dwarf, and like him too (considerin), with George the Fourth in such a state of astonishment at him as His Majesty couldn't with his utmost politeness and stoutness express. The front of the House was so covered with canvases, that there wasn't a spark of daylight ever visible on that side. "MAGSMAN'S AMUSEMENTS," fifteen foot long by two foot high, ran over the front door and parlour winders. The passage was a Arbour of green baize and gardenstuff. A barrel-organ performed there unceasing. And as to respectability, —if threepence ain't respectable, what is?'

IX

CHOPS THE DWARF

'But, the Dwarf is the principal article at present, and he was worth the money. He was wrote up as MAJOR TPSCHOFFKI, OF THE IMPERIAL BULGRADERIAN BRIGADE.



“ A grizzled personage in velveteen ”

Nobody couldn't pronounce the name, and it never was intended anybody should. The public always turned it, as a regular rule, into Chopski. In the line he was called Chops; partly on that account, and partly because his real name, if he ever had any real name (which was very dubious), was Stakes.

He was a uncommon small man, he really was. Certainly not so small as he was made out to be, but where *is* your Dwarf as is? He was a most uncommon small man, with a most uncommon large Ed; and what he had inside that Ed, nobody never knowed but himself: even supposin, himself to have ever took stock of it, which it would have been a stiff job for even him to do.

The kindest little man as never growed! Spirited, but not proud. When he travelled with the Spotted Baby—though he knowed himself to be a nat'ral Dwarf, and knowed the Baby's spots to be put upon him artificial, he nursed that baby like a mother. You never heerd him give a ill-name to a Giant. He *did* allow himself to break out into strong language respectin the Fat Lady from Norfolk; but that was an affair of the 'art; and when a man's 'art has been trifled with by a lady, and the preference giv to a Indian, he ain't master of his actions.

He was always in love, of course; every human nat'ral phenomenon is. And he was always in love with a large woman; *I* never knowed the Dwarf as could be got to love a small one. Which helps to keep 'em the Curiosities they are.

One sing'ler idea he had in that Ed of his, which must have meant something, or it wouldn't have been there. It was always his opinion that he was entitled to property. He never would put his name to anything. He had been taught to write, by the young man without arms, who got his living with his toes (quite a writing-master *he* was, and taught scores in the line), but Chops would have starved to death, afore he'd have gained a bit of bread by putting his hand to a paper. This is the more curious to bear in mind, because **HE** had no property, nor hope of property, except his house and a sarser. When I say his house, I mean the box, painted and got up outside like a reg'lar six-roomer, that he used to creep into, with a diamond ring (or quite as good to look at) on his forefinger, and ring a little bell out of what the Public believed to be the Drawing-room winder. And when I say a sarser, I mean a Chaney sarser in which he

made a collection for himself at the end of every Entertainment. His cue for that, he took from me; "Ladies and gentlemen, the little man will now walk three times round the Cairawan, and retire behind the curtain." When he said anything important, in private life, he mostly wound it up with this form of words, and they was generally the last thing he said to me at night afore he went to bed.

He had what I consider a fine mind—a poetic mind. His ideas respectin his property never come upon him so strong as when he sat upon a barrel-organ and had the handle turned. Arter the wibration had run through him a little time, he would screech out, "Toby, I feel my property coming—grind away! I'm counting my guineas by thousands, Toby—grind away! Toby, I shall be a man of fortun! I feel the Mint a jingling in me, Toby, and I'm swelling out into the Bank of England!" Such is the influence of music on a poetic mind.'

Most unexpectedly did Chops the Dwarf come into his property, "Twelve thousand odd hundred pound," through possessing the winning ticket in a lottery, and Magsman lost one of his great attractions. The little man had his wish and went into society, and the sequel is told in the following words:

"I took the House as is the subject of present inquiries—and I run Magsman's Amusements in it thirteen months—sometimes one thing, sometimes another, sometimes nothin' particular, but always all the canvases outside." One night, after the house was closed, Chops suddenly turned up, saying, "Magsman, take me, on the old terms, and you've got me; if it's done, say done!"

I was all of a maze, but I said, "Done, Sir."

"Done to your done, and double done!" says he.

Then the story was out:

"Magsman! The most material difference between the two states of existence through which your unappy friend has passed;" he reached out his poor little hand, and his tears dropped down on the moustachio which it was a credit to him to have done his best to grow, but it is not in mortals to command success,—“the difference is this. When I was out of Society, I was paid light for being seen. When I went

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into Society, I paid heavy for being seen. I prefer the former, even if I wasn't forced upon it. Give me out through the trumpet, in the hold way, to-morrow."

Arter that, he slid into the line again as easy as if he had been iled all over. But the organ was kep from him, and no allusions was ever made, when a company was in, to his property. He got wiser every day; his views of Society and the Public was luminous, bewilderin, awful; and his Ed got bigger and bigger as his Wisdom expanded it.

He took well, and pulled 'em in most excellent for nine weeks. At the expiration of that period, when his Ed was a sight, he expressed one evenin, the last Company having been turned out, and the door shut, a wish to have a little music.

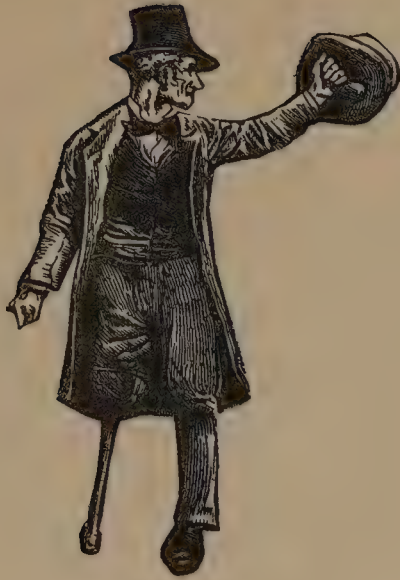
"Mr. Chops," I said (I never dropped the "Mr." with him; the world might do it, but not me); "Mr. Chops, are you sure as you are in a state of mind and body to sit upon the organ?"

His answer was this: "Toby, when next met with on the tramp, I forgive her and the Indian. And I am."

It was with fear and trembling that I began to turn the handle; but he sat like a lamb. It will be my belief to my dying day, that I see his Ed expand as he sat; you may therefore judge how great his thoughts was. He sat out all the changes, and then he come off.

"Toby," he says, with a quiet smile, "the little man will now walk three times round the Cairawan, and retire behind the curtain."

When we called him in the morning, we found him gone into a much better Society than mine or Pall Mall's. I giv Mr. Chops as comfortable a funeral as lay in my power, followed myself as Chief, and had the George the Fourth canvas carried first, in the form of a banner. But, the House was so dismal arterwards, that I giv it up, and took to the Wan again.'



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF SILAS WEGG

I

A ROGUE, A WILL AND A WOODEN LEG

SILAS WEGG was certainly a rogue, and as an itinerant vendor of ballads, a vagabond also. Whether he was always a rogue would be difficult to say; the very precariousness of his livelihood made him crafty, and when the opportunity came for him to enrich himself at the expense of another, he certainly was not slow to avail himself of it.

Like many another of his kind, Silas Wegg over-reached himself in his cupidity, and his decline and fall may perhaps be ascribed to Gibbon's famous work.

The trouble in which Silas Wegg became involved, like so many other troubles in which rogues are made, arose out of a will, or rather a series of wills, made by an eccentric and wealthy old man, the owner of a number of dust heaps or mounds in the neighbourhood of what is now King's Cross, London. This wealthy old man, by the name of Harmon, had quarrelled with his only son, who thereupon took himself abroad. The old man died, leaving a will by which

the bulk of his property was left to his son, on condition that he married a certain girl of his father's choice. Failure on the part of the son to comply with the terms of the will, or his death, would result in the whole of the property going to two old servants of the family, a Mr. and Mrs. Boffin.

Legally young John Harmon was dead; but it was really a case of mistaken identity. Profiting by this opportunity and under the name of John Rokesmith, the real John Harmon was enabled to see for himself the girl his father had chosen for him, and to win her love unfettered and unaided.

Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, two very lovable people, were ill at ease with their new found wealth. Mr. Boffin especially was not happy: for the sake of his wife he wished to follow "fashion", but he found it uncommonly against the grain. Added to that, he was unable to read—and the vast store of knowledge contained in the eight volumes of Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire", richly bound in red and decorated in gold, which he had purchased to embellish Mrs. Boffin's "fashion" portion of the sitting-room, was an unattainable delight to him.

Now Mr. Boffin, in the course of his daily walks, had often passed the stall of a wooden-legged ballad-monger, situated "Over against a London house, a corner house not far from Cavendish Square", where for many years a man with a wooden leg had sat "with his remaining foot in a basket in cold weather". This man was Silas Wegg,

'A knotty man, and a close-grained, with a face carved out of very hard material, that had just as much play of expression as a watchman's rattle. When he laughed, certain jerks occurred in it, and the rattle sprung. Sooth to say, he was so wooden a man that he seemed to have taken his wooden leg naturally, and rather suggested to the fanciful observer, that he might be expected—if his development received no untimely check—to be completely set up with a pair of wooden legs in about six months. . . .

Every morning at eight o'clock, he stumped to the corner, carrying a chair, a clothes-horse, a pair of trestles, a board, a basket, and an umbrella, all strapped together. Separating these, the board and trestles became a counter, the basket supplied the few small lots of fruit and sweets that he offered for sale upon it and became a foot-warmer, the unfolded clothes-horse displayed a choice collection of halfpenny

ballads and became a screen, and the stool planted within it became his post for the rest of the day.'

In addition to the ballads, there was other stock-in-trade of this "hardest little stall of all the sterile little stalls in London. . . . It gave you the face ache to look at his apples, the stomach ache to look at his oranges, and the toothache to look at his nuts."

Mr. Boffin had been a customer of the stall on an earlier occasion. He had actually bought one of the ballads, and being unacquainted with the tune, Wegg had "run it over to him".

Then the whole secret leaked out: Boffin confessed

"I listened with hadmiration amounting to haw. I thought to myself, 'Here's a man with a wooden leg. . . .

"'A literary man—with a wooden leg—and all Print is open to him!' That's what I thought to myself, that morning," pursued Mr. Boffin. . . .

"Then consider this. Here am I, a man without a wooden leg, and yet all print is shut to me. . . .

"Now, it's too late for me to begin shovelling and sifting at alphabeds and grammar-books. I'm getting to be a old bird, and I want to take it easy. But I want some reading—some fine bold reading, some splendid book in a gorging Lord-Mayor's-Show of wollumes" (probably meaning gorgeous, but misled by association of ideas); "as'll reach right down your pint of view, and take time to go by you. How can I get that reading, Wegg? By," tapping him on the breast with the head of his thick stick, "paying a man truly qualified to do it, so much an hour (say twopence) to come and do it."

II

THE ENGAGEMENT

And so a bargain was struck; Wegg never haggled—nevertheless he clinched the bargain at double the money!—for the weekly sum of five shillings Wegg was to read to Mr. Boffin two hours each night six nights a week. "Poetry" would come dearer, declared Wegg and he could not offer to "tip" a ballad or two; "not being a regular musical



“The hardest little stall of all the sterile little stalls in London.”

professional I should be loth to engage myself for that, and therefore when I dropped into poetry I should ask to be considered in the light of a friend."

Mr. Boffin was all eagerness to begin; was he provided "with the needful implement—a book?" inquired Wegg.

"Bought him at a sale," said Mr. Boffin. "Eight wollumes. Red and gold. Purple ribbon in every wollume, to keep the place where you leave off. Do you know him?"

"The book's name, sir?" inquired Silas.

"I thought you might have know'd him without it," said Mr. Boffin, slightly disappointed. "His name is Decline-and-Fall-Off-The-Rooshan-Empire." (Mr. Boffin went over these stones slowly and with much caution.)

"Ay indeed!" said Mr. Wegg, nodding his head with an air of friendly recognition.

"You know him, Wegg?"

"I haven't been not to say right slap through him, very lately," Mr. Wegg made answer, "'having been otherways employed, Mr. Boffin. But know him? Old familiar declining and falling off the Rooshan? Rather, sir! Ever since I was not so high as your stick. Ever since my eldest brother left our cottage to enlist into the army. On which occasion, as the ballad that was made about it describes:

"Beside that cottage door, Mr. Boffin,
A girl was on her knees;
She held aloft a snowy scarf, sir,
Which (my eldest brother noticed) fluttered in the breeze.
She breathed a prayer for him, Mr. Boffin;
A prayer he could not hear.
And my eldest brother lean'd upon his sword, Mr. Boffin,
And wiped away a tear."

Much impressed by this family circumstance, and also by the friendly disposition of Mr. Wegg, as exemplified in his so soon dropping into poetry, Mr. Boffin again shook hands with that ligneous sharper, and besought him to name his hour. Mr. Wegg named eight. . . .

Left alone at his stall as the other ambled off, Mr. Wegg subsided into his screen . . . profound gravity sat enthroned on Wegg's countenance. For, while he considered within himself that this was an old fellow of rare simplicity, that this was an opportunity to be improved, and that here might be money to be got beyond present calculation, still

he compromised himself by no admission that this new engagement was at all out of his way, or involved the least element of the ridiculous. Mr. Wegg would even have picked a handsome quarrel with any one who should have challenged his deep acquaintance with those aforesaid eight volumes of *Decline and Fall*. His gravity was unusual, portentous, and immeasurable, not because he admitted any doubt of himself, but because he perceived it necessary to forestall any doubt of himself in others. And herein he ranged with that very numerous class of impostors, who are quite as determined to keep up appearances to themselves, as to their neighbours.'

III

INCREASING CUPIDITY

The missing leg of Silas Wegg—a "hospital amputation"—had come into the possession of an articulator of bones, bearing the remarkable patronymic of Venus: and it was the custom of Wegg to pay periodical visits to the little shop of this love-lorn elderly man, to view the remains of his lost member. Hearing that Wegg had an appointment at "Harmons, up Battle Bridge way" and would therefore have to cut his visit short, Mr. Venus ventured the remark,

"You ought to be in a good thing, if you've worked yourself in there. There's lots of money going there. . . . The old gentleman wanted to know the nature and worth of everything that was found in the dust; and many's the bone, and feather, and what not, that he's brought to me. . . . The old gentleman was well known all round here. There used to be stories about his having hidden all kinds of property in those dust mounds."

This set the wily Wegg to consider how he could turn his present position to one of greater advantage. His first was to induce Mr. Boffin to purchase the mansion near Cavendish Square outside which he had for so many years set up his stall, with a view to securing for himself the house by the dust-heaps in which the Boffins at present resided.

It must here be noted that Mr. Boffin had lately engaged a secretary, and this weighed somewhat heavily on his mind.

He had been assured that a man of his wealth and position ought to have a secretary, and the sample of the work the secretary would do and could do was so satisfactory that he had engaged him. That the secretary who had thus pushed himself forcibly into the confidence of Mr. Boffin was the very man who was heir to the property Mr. Boffin was at present enjoying, is a coincidence allowable to the novelist, and we will pass it by. Mr. Boffin, however, whilst realising the superior qualifications of his secretary, John Rokesmith, as compared with his older and more familiar friend, Wegg, was anxious to appease the latter; hence came the offer of permanent accommodation at 'The Bower, "with coals and candles and a pound a week" without detriment to the sum already received for his literary services.

'The man of low cunning had, of course, acquired a mastery over the man of high simplicity. . . . The undesigning Boffin had become so far immeshed by the wily Wegg that his mind misgave him he was a very designing man indeed in purposing to do more for Wegg. It seemed to him (so skilful was Wegg) that he was plotting darkly, when he was contriving to do the very thing that Wegg was plotting to get him to do.'

Wegg was eloquent in his acceptance of the offer:

"My stall and I are for ever parted. The collection of ballads will in future be reserved for private study, with the object of making poetry tributary"—Wegg was so proud of having found this word, that he said it again, with a capital letter—"Tributary to friendship." . . .

When Mr. Silas Wegg did at last obtain free access to "Our House," as he had been wont to call the mansion outside which he had sat shelterless so long, and when he did at last find it in all particulars as different from his mental plans of it he . . . affected to fall into a melancholy strain of musing over the mournful past: as if the house and he had had a fall in life together.

"And this, sir," Silas would say to his patron, sadly nodding his head and musing, "was once Our House! This, sir, is the building from which I have so often seen those great creatures, Miss Elizabeth, Master George, Aunt Jane, and Uncle Parker"—whose very names were of his own

inventing—"pass and repass! And has it come to this, indeed! Ah dear me, dear me!"

So tender were his lamentations, that the kindly Mr. Boffin was quite sorry for him, and almost felt mistrustful that in buying the house he had done him an irreparable injury.'

IV

THE FRIENDLY MOVE

The usefulness of Rokesmith, the secretary, soon found its ascendancy over the humbug of Wegg, the hypocrite and fawner, and evoked the following outburst on the part of Wegg to his friend Venus "surrounded by the trophies of his art":

"Here is an immense fortune drops from the clouds upon a person that shall be nameless. Here is a weekly allowance, with a certain weight of coals, drops from the clouds upon me. Which of us is the better man? Not the person that shall be nameless. That's an observation of mine, but I don't make it an objection. I take my allowance and my certain weight of coals. He takes his fortune. That's the way it works. . . .

"Him that shall be nameless, passes me by, and puts a talking-over stranger above my head. Which of us two is the better man? Which of us two can repeat most poetry? Which of us two has, in the service of him that shall be nameless, tackled the Romans, both civil and military, till he has got as husky as if he'd been weaned and ever since brought up on sawdust? Not the talking-over stranger. Yet the house is as free to him as if it was his, and he has his room, and is put upon a footing, and draws about a thousand a year. I am banished to the Bower, to be found in it like a piece of furniture whenever wanted. Merit, therefore, don't win."

The result of this consultation was "the friendly move" on the part of Wegg and Venus with the object of bringing Mr. Boffin's nose "to the grindstone". Said Wegg with a noble air:

"If there *is* anything to be found on these premises, let us find it together. Let us make the friendly move of agreeing

to look for it together. Let us make the friendly move of agreeing to share the profits of it equally betwixt us. In the cause of the right."

The fact was, he had searched on his own but met with great difficulties owing to his infirmity, and wanted a capable assistant; he had found "a want of adaptation in a wooden leg to ladders and such-like airy perches," and had also discovered "an inherent tendency in that timber fiction, when called into action for the purposes of a promenade on an ashy slope, to stick itself into the yielding foothold, and peg its owner to one spot."

Mr. Wegg then went on to enlarge upon what had been uppermost in his crafty mind:—the qualifications of Mr. Venus for such a search; his patient habits and delicate manipulation; his skill in piecing little things together;

"While as to myself," said Wegg, "I am not good at it. Whether I gave myself up to prodding, or whether I gave myself up to scooping, I couldn't do it with that delicate touch so as not to show that I was disturbing the mounds. Quite different with *you*, going to work (as *you* would) in the light of a fellow-man, holily pledged in a friendly move to his brother man."

The digging and prodding of the mounds by Silas Wegg did not prove in any way profitable; but there were other ways of discovering the deposits of a secretive man and at length Wegg was rewarded.

He discovered, hidden in a pump, a cash box and a will of a later date than that under which Mr. Boffin was at present enjoying his prosperity, by which the small mound only was bequeathed to Mr. Boffin, and the whole of the rest of the property was given to the Crown. Here then, thought Wegg, was the means of gaining a great ascendancy over Boffin and his fortune.

The "friendly movers" were not a little disconcerted, however, to find that Mr. Boffin, too, went prodding among the mounds; Wegg especially took it ill that Boffin should be interfering with what he regarded now as his own particular property!

They watched him one night, digging away at the little mound, and from it remove 'one of those squat, high-shouldered, short-necked glass bottles which the Dutchman is said to keep his Courage in,' and make off with it. Their plans not being yet prepared, Venus had to restrain Wegg from boldly attacking Mr. Boffin and recovering the bottle.

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“He mustn't go,” he cried. “We mustn't let him go! He has got that bottle about him. We must have that bottle.”

“Why, you wouldn't take it by force?” said Venus, restraining him.

“Wouldn't I? Yes, I would. I'd take it by any force, I'd have it at any price! Are you so afraid of one old man as to let him go, you coward?”

“I am so afraid of you as not to let *you* go,” muttered Venus, sturdily clasping him in his arms.

“Did you hear him?” retorted Wegg. “Did you hear him say that he was resolved to disappoint us? Did you hear him say, you cur, that he was going to have the Mounds cleared off, when no doubt the whole place will be rummaged? If you haven't the spirit of a mouse to defend your rights, I have. Let me go after him.”

As in his wildness he was making a strong struggle for it, Mr. Venus deemed it expedient to lift him, throw him, and fall with him; well knowing that, once down, he would not be up again easily with his wooden leg. So they both rolled on the floor, and, as they did so, Mr. Boffin shut the gate.

V

HIS NOSE TO THE GRINDSTONE

At a subsequent meeting the final plan of campaign was outlined by Wegg, on the minimum basis of “Halves”.

‘The plan of action was that they should lie by with patience, that they should allow the Mounds to be gradually levelled and cleared away, while retaining to themselves their present opportunity of watching the process—which would be, he conceived, to put the trouble and cost of daily digging and delving upon somebody else, while they might nightly turn such complete disturbance of the dust to the account of their own private investigations; and that, when the Mounds were gone, and they had worked those chances for their own joint benefit solely, they should then, and not before, explode on the minion and worm. . . . If, said Mr. Wegg by way of peroration, he had erred in saying only “Halves!” he trusted to his comrade, brother, and partner not to hesitate to set him right, and to reprove his weakness.

It might be more according to the rights of things, to say Two-thirds; it might be more according to the rights of things, to say Three-fourths. On those points he was ever open to correction.'

* * * * *

The slow process of clearing away the mounds wore Silas Wegg almost to skin and bone, so that the wooden leg stood out quite disproportionately. He watched each separate cart load with rapacious eye. The supervisor of the proceedings appeared to take an unholy pleasure in ordering the work to be done at all sorts of unexpected hours, day and night.

'Seeming never to need sleep himself, he would reappear, with a tied-up broken head, in fantail hat and velveteen smalls, like an accursed goblin, at the most unholy and untimely hours. . . .

The more his persecutor besought him not to trouble himself to turn out, the more suspicious was the crafty Wegg that indications had been observed of something hidden somewhere, and that attempts were on foot to circumvent him.

"I consider his planting one of his menial tools in the yard, an act of sneaking and sniffing. And his nose shall be put to the grindstone for it."

"It was not your fault, Mr. Wegg, I must admit," said Venus, "that he got off with the Dutch bottle that night."

"As you handsomely say again, partner! No, it was not my fault. I'd have had that bottle out of him. Was it to be borne that he should come, like a thief in the dark, digging among stuff that was far more ours than his (seeing that we could deprive him of every grain of it, if he didn't buy us at our own figure), and carrying off treasure from its bowels? No, it was not to be borne. And for that, too, his nose shall be put to the grindstone."

"How do you propose to do it, Mr. Wegg?"

"To put his nose to the grindstone? I propose," returned that estimable man, "to insult him openly. And if, looking into this eye of mine, he dares to offer a word in answer, to retort upon him before he can take his breath, 'Add another word to that, you dusty old dog, and you're a beggar.'"

"Suppose he says nothing, Mr. Wegg?"

"Then," replied Wegg, "we shall have come to an understanding with very little trouble, and I'll break him and drive him, Mr. Venus. I'll put him in harness, and I'll bear him up tight, and I'll break him and drive him. The harder the old Dust is driven, sir, the higher he'll pay. And I mean to be paid high, Mr. Venus, I promise you."

"You speak quite revengefully, Mr. Wegg."

"Revengefully, sir? Is it for him that I have declined and falled, night after night? Is it for his pleasure that I've waited at home of an evening, like a set of skittles, to be set up and knocked over, and set up and knocked over, by whatever balls—or books—he chose to bring against me? Why, I'm a hundred times the man he is, sir; five hundred times!"

VI

THE HOUR FOR BOFFIN TO STUMP UP

Mr. Venus was no rogue, and when he saw to what straits his association with Wegg was likely to lead him he paid a visit to Mr. Boffin, and without desiring any reward, furnished him with a full account of the little conspiracy into which he had been innocently dragged. Mr. Boffin was therefore quite prepared when Wegg finally appeared to make his impudent demands.

'Venus was punctual, and Wegg undertook to knock at the door, and conduct the conference. Door knocked at. Door opened.

"Boffin at home?"

The servant replied that *Mr.* Boffin was at home.

"He'll do," said Wegg, "though it ain't what I call him."

They were shown into a waiting-room, where the all-powerful Wegg wore his hat, and whistled, and with his forefinger stirred up a clock that stood upon the chimney-piece, until he made it strike. In a few minutes they were shown up-stairs into what used to be Boffin's room. . . . Here Boffin was seated at a library-table, and here Mr. Wegg, having imperiously motioned the servant to withdraw, drew up a chair, and seated himself, in his hat, close beside him. Here, also, Mr. Wegg instantly underwent the remarkable experience of having his hat twitched off his head and thrown out of a window, which was opened and shut for the purpose.

"Be careful what insolent liberties you take in that gentleman's presence," said the owner of the hand which had done this, "or I will throw you after it."

Wegg involuntarily clapped his hand to his bare head, and stared at the Secretary. For it was he addressed him with a severe countenance, and who had come in quietly by the folding-doors.

"Oh!" said Wegg, as soon as he recovered his suspended power of speech. "Very good! I gave directions for you to be dismissed. And you ain't gone, ain't you? Oh! We'll look into this presently. Very good!"

"No, nor *I* ain't gone," said another voice.

Somebody else had come in quietly by the folding-doors. Turning his head, Wegg beheld his persecutor, the ever-wakeful dustman, accoutred with fantail hat and velveteen smalls complete. Who, untying his tied-up broken head, revealed a head that was whole, and a face that was Sloppy's. . . .

"Oh!" said Wegg, slightly discomfited, but not much as yet: "one and one is two not dismissed, is it? Bof—fin! Just let me ask a question. Who set this chap on, in this dress, when the carting began? Who employed this fellow?"

"I say!" remonstrated Sloppy, jerking his head forward. "No fellows, or *I*'ll throw you out of winder!"

Mr. Boffin appeased him with a wave of his hand, and said: "I employed him, Wegg."

"Oh! You employed him, Boffin? Very good. Mr. Venus, we raise our terms, and we can't do better than proceed to business. . . . Mr. Venus, will you be so good as hand me over that same dockyment?"

"Certainly, sir," replied Venus, handing it to him with much politeness. "There it is. Having now, sir, parted with it, I wish to make a small observation: not so much because it is always necessary, or expresses any new doctrine or discovery, as because it is a comfort to my mind. Silas Wegg, you are a precious old rascal."

Mr. Wegg, who, as if anticipating a compliment, had been beating time with the paper to the other's politeness until this unexpected conclusion came upon him, stopped rather abruptly.

"Silas Wegg," said Venus, "know that I took the liberty of taking Mr. Boffin into our concern as a sleeping partner, at a very early period of our firm's existence."

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“Quite true,” added Mr. Boffin; “and I tested Venus by making him a pretended proposal or two; and I found him on the whole a very honest man, Wegg.” . . .

“Everything else between you and me, Mr. Wegg,” said Venus, “now explains itself. . . . But totally to prevent any unpleasantness or mistake . . . I beg the leave of Mr. Boffin and Mr. John Harmon to repeat an observation which I have already had the pleasure of bringing under your notice. You are a precious old rascal!”

“You are a fool,” said Wegg, with a snap of his fingers, “and I’d have got rid of you before now, if I could have struck out any way of doing it. I have thought it over, I can tell you. You may go and welcome. You leave the more for me. Because, you know,” said Wegg, dividing his next observation between Mr. Boffin and Mr. Harmon, “I am worth my price, and I mean to have it. This getting off is all very well in its way, and it tells with such an anatomical Pump as this one,” pointing out Mr. Venus, “but it won’t do with a Man. I am here to be bought off, and I have named my figure. Now, buy me, or leave me.”

“I’ll leave you, Wegg,” said Mr. Boffin, laughing, “as far as I am concerned.”

“Bof—fin!” replied Wegg, turning upon him with a severe air. “I understand *your* new-born boldness. I see the brass underneath *your* silver plating. *You* have got *your* nose put out of joint. Knowing that you’ve nothing at stake, you can afford to come the independent game. Why, you’re just so much smeary glass to see through, you know! But Mr. Harmon is in another situation. What Mr. Harmon risks is quite another pair of shoes. Now, I’ve heard something lately about this being Mr. Harmon . . . and I drop you, Bof—fin, as beneath my notice. I ask Mr. Harmon whether he has any idea of the contents of this present paper?”

“It is a will of my late father’s, of more recent date than the will proved by Mr. Boffin, . . . leaving the whole of his property to the Crown,” said John Harmon. . . .

“Right you are!” cried Wegg. “Then,” screwing the weight of his body upon his wooden leg, and screwing his wooden head very much on one side, and screwing up one eye: “then, I put the question to you, what’s this paper worth?”

“Nothing,” said John Harmon.

Wegg had repeated the word with a sneer, and was entering on some sarcastic retort, when, to his boundless amazement,

he found himself gripped by the cravat; shaken until his teeth chattered; shoved back, staggering, into a corner of the room; and pinned there.

"You scoundrel!" said John Harmon, whose seafaring hold was like that of a vice.

"You're knocking my head against the wall," urged Silas faintly.

"I mean to knock your head against the wall," returned John Harmon, suiting his action to his words, with the heartiest good-will; "and I'd give a thousand pounds for leave to knock your brains out. Listen, you scoundrel, and look at that Dutch bottle."

Then Wegg learned from John Harmon that the Dutch bottle contained "the latest will of the many wills" made by his father; that it had been found by Mr. Boffin and that it left everything to Mr. Boffin absolutely. That Mr. Boffin was much distressed by the discovery as it put the rightful heir at such a disadvantage, so he hid the will in the Dutch bottle and buried it in his own mound. When he discovered that his secretary, Rokesmith, was really John Harmon he made him promise that he would take the fortune (having already won the girl of his father's choice) and leave him his mound and nothing more, and it was not until after that promise was made that the secret of the Dutch bottle was revealed.

"I owe everything I possess" explained Harmon, "solely to the disinterestedness, uprightness, tenderness, goodness (there are no words to satisfy me) of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin. And when, knowing what I knew, I saw such a mud-worm as you presume to rise in this house against this noble soul, the wonder is," added John Harmon through his clenched teeth, and with a very ugly turn indeed on Wegg's cravat, "that I didn't try to twist your head off, and fling *that* out of window! So. That's the last short speech, do you understand?"

VII

THE FINAL THROW

Poor Wegg was completely cornered; his rascality was of the shallowest nature, yet he could see that he would have to

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move sharply if he wished to save anything from the wreck of his fortune.

“I am sorry, Wegg,” said Mr. Boffin, in his clemency, “that my old lady and I can’t have a better opinion of you than the bad one we are forced to entertain. But I shouldn’t like to leave you, after all said and done, worse off in life than I found you. Therefore say in a word, before we part, what it’ll cost to set you up in another stall.”

“And in another place,” John Harmon struck in. “You don’t come outside these windows.”

“Mr. Boffin,” returned Wegg in avaricious humiliation: “when I first had the honour of making your acquaintance, I had got together a collection of ballads which was, I may say, above price . . . and there was a new stock of ginger-bread in the tin box. I say no more, but would rather leave it to you.”

“But it’s difficult to name what’s right,” said Mr. Boffin uneasily, with his hand in his pocket, “and I don’t want to go beyond what’s right, because you really have turned out such a very bad fellow. So artful, and so ungrateful you have been, Wegg; for when did I ever injure you?”

“There was also,” Mr. Wegg went on, in a meditative manner, “a errand connexion, in which I was much respected. But I would not wish to be deemed covetous, and I would rather leave it to you, Mr. Boffin.” . . .

“There was likewise,” resumed Wegg, “a pair of trestles, for which alone a Irish person, who was deemed a judge of trestles, offered five and six—a sum I would not hear of, for I should have lost by it—and there was a stool, a umbrella, a clothes-horse, and a tray. But I leave it to you, Mr. Boffin.”

The Golden Dustman seeming to be engaged in some abstruse calculation, Mr. Wegg assisted him with the following additional items.

“There was, further, Miss Elizabeth, Master George, Aunt Jane, and Uncle Parker. Ah! When a man thinks of the loss of such patronage as that; when a man finds so fair a garden rooted up by pigs; he finds it hard indeed, without going high, to work it into money. But I leave it wholly to you, sir. . . .”

“Come!” said Mr. Boffin. “Here’s a couple of pound.”

“In justice to myself, I couldn’t take it, sir.”

The words were but out of his mouth when John Harmon lifted his finger, and Sloppy, who was now close to Wegg,

backed to Wegg's back, stooped, grasped his coat collar behind with both hands, and deftly swung him up like the sack of flour or coals before mentioned. A countenance of special discontent and amazement Mr. Wegg exhibited in this position, with his buttons almost as prominently on view as Sloppy's own, and with his wooden leg in a highly unaccommodating state. But not for many seconds was his countenance visible in the room; for Sloppy lightly trotted out with him and trotted down the staircase, Mr. Venus attending to open the street door. Mr. Sloppy's instructions had been to deposit his burden in the road; but a scavenger's cart happening to stand unattended at the corner, with its little ladder planted against the wheel, Mr. S. found it impossible to resist the temptation of shooting Mr. Silas Wegg into the cart's contents. A somewhat difficult feat, achieved with great dexterity, and with a prodigious splash.'



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

ROGUE RIDERHOOD

I

THE ROGUE

His first name was really Roger, but among the waterside characters of Limehouse Hole he was, not inappropriately known as Rogue. His chief means of livelihood was the recovery of drowned people from the river, in which trade he was once the partner of Gaffer Hexam; but that partnership had just been dissolved, Rogue Riderhood having been accused of robbing a live man. Robbing the dead was not a crime in the eyes of either.

“Has a dead man any use for money? Is it possible for a dead man to have money? What world does a dead man belong to? T’other world. What world does money belong to? This world?”

Such was the Rogue’s philosophy.

At about this time a body had been discovered in the river and the death was the result of foul play. It was supposed to be the body of one John Harmon, lately returned from

abroad to inherit a fortune from his father, from whom he had been long estranged. A substantial reward had been offered for the discovery of the murderer, and Rogue Riderhood saw in this not only a means of enriching himself, but of avenging himself on his late partner at the same time.

“I am the man that suspects him.” . . .

“It stands this way. When I was his pardner, I couldn’t never give him satisfaction. Why couldn’t I never give him satisfaction? Because my luck was bad; because I couldn’t find many enough of ’em. How was his luck? Always good. Notice this! Always good! Ah!

“If you’re out upon the river pretty nigh every tide, and if you want to find a man or woman in the river, you’ll greatly help your luck by knocking a man or woman on the head aforehand and pitching ’em in. . . .

“I’ll follow him up. And mind you! I’ll bring him to book at last, if it’s twenty year hence, I will!”

Rogue Riderhood accordingly betakes himself to the Temple to give the necessary information to the lawyer named in the notice offering the reward, Mortimer Lightwood.

II

THE ROGUE BEFORE THE LAWYERS

“I ask your pardons, Governors, but might one on you be Lawyer Lightwood?”

“One of us is,” said the owner of that name.

“All right, Governors Both,” returned the ghost, carefully closing the room door; “tickler business.”

Mortimer lighted the candles. They showed the visitor to be an ill-looking visitor with a squinting leer, who, as he spoke, fumbled at an old sodden fur cap, formless and mangey, that looked like a furry animal, dog or cat, puppy or kitten, drowned and decaying.

“Now,” said Mortimer, “what is it?”

“Governors Both,” returned the man, in what he meant to be a wheedling tone, “which on you might be Lawyer Lightwood?”

“I am.”

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"Lawyer Lightwood," ducking at him with a servile air, "I am a man as gets my living, and as seeks to get my living, by the sweat of my brow. Not to risk being done out of the sweat of my brow, by any chances, I should wish afore going further to be swore in."

"I am not a swearer in of people, man."

The visitor, clearly anything but reliant on this assurance, doggedly muttered "Alfred David."

"Is that your name?" asked Lightwood.

"My name?" returned the man. "No; I want to take a Alfred David."

(Which Eugene, smoking and contemplating him, interpreted as meaning Affidavit.)

"I tell you, my good fellow," said Lightwood, with his indolent laugh, "that I have nothing to do with swearing. . . ."

"Then I must be took down."

"Where?" asked Lightwood.

"Here," said the man. "In pen and ink."

"First, let us know what your business is about."

"It's about," said the man, taking a step forward, dropping his hoarse voice, and shading it with his hand, "it's about from five to ten thousand pound reward. That's what's it about. It's about Murder. That's what it's about."

"Come nearer the table. Sit down. Will you have a glass of wine?"

"Yes, I will," said the man; "and I don't deceive you, Governors."

It was given him. . . .

"Now," began Lightwood, "what's your name?"

"Why, there you're rather fast, Lawyer Lightwood," he replied, in a remonstrant manner. "Don't you see, Lawyer Lightwood? There you're a little bit fast. I'm going to earn from five to ten thousand pound by the sweat of my brow, and as a poor man doing justice to the sweat of my brow, is it likely I can afford to part with so much as my name without its being took down?"

Deferring to the man's sense of the binding powers of pen and ink and paper, Lightwood nodded acceptance of Eugene's nodded proposal to take those spells in hand. Eugene, bringing them to the table, sat down as clerk or notary.

"Now," said Lightwood, "what's your name?"

But further precaution was still due to the sweat of this honest fellow's brow.

"I should wish, Lawyer Lightwood," he stipulated, "to have that T'other Governor as my witness that what I said I said. Consequent, will the T'other Governor be so good as chuck me his name and where he lives?"

Eugene, cigar in mouth and pen in hand, tossed him his card. After spelling it out slowly, the man made it into a little roll and tied it up in an end of his neckerchief still more slowly.

"Now," said Lightwood, for the third time, "if you have quite completed your various preparations, my friend, and have fully ascertained that your spirits are cool and not in any way hurried, what's your name?"

"Roger Riderhood."

"Dwelling-place?"

"Lime'us Hole."

"Calling or occupation?"

Not quite so glib with this answer as with the previous two, Mr. Riderhood gave in the definition, "Waterside character."

"Anything against you?" Eugene quietly put in as he wrote.

Rather baulked, Mr. Riderhood evasively remarked, with an innocent air, that "he believed the T'other Governor had asked him summat."

"Ever in trouble?" said Eugene.

"Once." (Might happen to any man, Mr. Riderhood added incidentally.)

"On suspicion of——?"

"Of seaman's pocket," said Mr. Riderhood. "Whereby I was in reality the man's best friend, and tried to take care of him."

"With the sweat of your brow?" asked Eugene.

"Till it poured down like rain," said Roger Riderhood.

Eugene leaned back in his chair and smoked, with his eyes negligently turned on the informer, and his pen ready to reduce him to more writing. Lightwood also smoked, with his eyes negligently turned on the informer.

"Now let me be took down again," said Riderhood, when he had turned the drowned cap over and under, and had brushed it the wrong way (if it had a right way) with his sleeve. "I give information that the man that done the Harmon Murder is Gaffer Hexam, the man that found the body. . . His hand and no other." . . .

"Tell us on what grounds you make this accusation," said Mortimer Lightwood.

“On the grounds,” answered Riderhood, wiping his face with his sleeve, “that I was Gaffer’s pardner, and suspected of him many a long day and many a dark night.”

But to swear to a mere suspicion is not enough, he is informed by the two lawyers, “Governor’s Both.”

“And did I say it was enough?” he asks sharply. . . .

“Let me be took down then!” cried the informer, eagerly and anxiously. “Let me be took down, for by George and the Draggin I’m a-coming to it now! Don’t do nothing to keep back from a honest man the fruits of the sweat of his brow! I give information, then, that he told me that he done it. Is *that* enough?”

“Take care what you say, my friend,” returned Mortimer.

“Lawyer Lightwood, take care, you, what I say; for I judge you’ll be answerable for follering it up!” Then, slowly and emphatically beating it all out with his open right hand on the palm of his left; “I, Roger Riderhood, Lime’us Hole, Waterside character, tell you, Lawyer Lightwood, that the man Jesse Hexam, commonly called upon the river and along-shore Gaffer, told me that he done the deed. What’s more, he told me with his own lips that he done the deed. What’s more, he said that he had done the deed. And I’ll swear it!”

“He says to me, ‘Rogue Riderhood’—for that’s the name I’m mostly called by—not for any meaning in it, for meaning it has none, but because of its being similar to Roger.”

“Never mind that.”

“’Scuse *me*, Lawyer Lightwood, it’s a part of the truth, and as such I do mind it, and I must mind it and I will mind it. ‘Rogue Riderhood,’ he says, ‘words passed betwixt us on the river to-night.’ Which they had: ask his daughter! ‘I threatened you,’ he says, ‘to chop you over the fingers with my boat’s stretcher, or take a aim at your brains with my boat-hook. I did so on accounts of your looking too hard at what I had in tow, as if you was suspicious, and on accounts of your holding on to the gunwhale of my boat.’ I says to him, ‘Gaffer, I know it.’ He says to me, ‘Rogue Riderhood, you are a man in a dozen—I think he said in a score, but of that I am not positive, so take the lowest figure, for precious be the obligations of a Alfred David. ‘And,’ he says, ‘when your fellow-men is up. be it their lives or be it their watches,

sharp is ever the word with you. Had you suspicions?' I says, 'Gaffer, I had; and what's more, I have.' He falls a-shaking, and he says, 'Of what?' I says, 'Of foul play.' He falls a-shaking worse, and he says, 'There *was* foul play then. I done it for his money. Don't betray me!' Those were the words as ever he used."

There was a silence, broken only by the fall of the ashes in the grate. An opportunity which the informer improved by smearing himself all over the head and neck and face with his drowned cap, and not at all improving his own appearance.

"What more?" asked Lightwood.

"Of him, d'ye mean, Lawyer Lightwood?"

"Of anything to the purpose."

"Now I'm blest if I understand you, Governors Both," said the informer, in a creeping manner: propitiating both, though only one had spoken. "What? Ain't *that* enough?"

"Did you ask him how he did it, where he did it, when he did it?"

"Far be it from me, Lawyer Lightwood! I was so troubled in my mind, that I wouldn't have knowed more, no, not for the sum as I expect to earn from you by the sweat of my brow, twice told! I had put an end to the pardnership. I had cut the connexion. I couldn't undo what was done; and when he begs and prays, 'Old pardner, on my knees, don't split upon me!' I only makes answer, 'Never speak another word to Roger Riderhood, nor look him in the face!' and I shuns that man. . . ."

"So I made up my mind to get my trouble off my mind, and to earn by the sweat of my brow what was held out to me. And what's more," he added, suddenly turning blood-thirsty, "I mean to have it! And now I tell you, once and away, Lawyer Lightwood, that Jesse Hexam, commonly called Gaffer, his hand and no other, done the deed, on his own confession to me. And I give him up to you, and I want him took. This night!"

The two lawyers and Riderhood accordingly set off for Limehouse where they first visit the Police Station. Here Riderhood makes his formal charge against Hexam. This done they seek out the accused man; but he is not at home; investigation leads to the discovery of his broken boat and later the dead body of Gaffer Hexam is washed ashore, entangled in his own rope. While plying his nefarious

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trade during a squall, he had apparently overbalanced himself in stretching overside to clear out the pockets of a dead man before hauling him on board!

“By the Lord, he’s done me. Gaffer’s done me,” exclaims Rogue Riderhood on perceiving the lifeless body on the shore.

III

THE SCHOOLMASTER

There is now introduced on the scene a schoolmaster, whose ungovernable passions are his undoing. Dickens had but little sympathy with schoolmasters, more’s the pity; if he had, he might have succeeded in doing much good. Two such schoolmasters as Squeers and Headstone, by far outweigh whatever good there may have been in Mr. Marton and Dr. Strong; and Mr. Mell is entirely overshadowed by Mr. Creakle. Bradley Headstone is never shown at his best in any of the pages of *Our Mutual Friend*, and he shines the least in his transactions with Riderhood, when the Rogue often captures our sympathies; but we have none with Headstone, who, if Dickens’s description of him was true, deserves them to the utmost measure.

‘Bradley Headstone, in his decent black coat and waistcoat, and decent white shirt, and decent formal black tie, and decent pantaloons of pepper and salt, with his decent silver watch in his pocket and its decent hair-guard round his neck, looked a thoroughly decent young man of six-and-twenty . . . He had acquired mechanically a great store of teacher’s knowledge . . . From his early childhood up his mind had been a place of mechanical stowage. The arrangement of his wholesale warehouse, so that it might be always ready to meet the demands of retail dealers—history here, geography there, astronomy to the right, political economy to the left—had imparted to his countenance a look of care; while the habit of questioning and being questioned had given him a suspicious manner, or a manner that would be better described as one of lying in wait. There was a kind of settled trouble in the face. It was the face belonging to a naturally slow or inattentive intellect that had toiled hard to get what it had won, and that had to hold it now that it was gotten. He always seemed to be uneasy lest anything should be missing

from his mental warehouse, and taking stock to assure himself.'

Bradley Headstone was madly in love with Lizzie, the daughter of the now deceased Gaffer Hexam. Her brother was a protégé of his at the school where he was master. Ever since the visit Eugene Wrayburn had paid to Limehouse and to the home of Hexam, Eugene had expressed more than a passing interest in Lizzie, and had more than once visited her on her removal to Millbank, where she lodged with Jenny Wren, the doll's dressmaker.

Of an extremely jealous nature was Bradley Headstone, and hot-tempered too; which gave a certain amount of sport to Eugene, who took a fiendish delight in tormenting Headstone in the following manner.

“I goad the schoolmaster to madness . . . The amiable occupation has been the solace of my life . . . I do it thus: I stroll out after dark, stroll a little way, look in at a window and furtively look out for the schoolmaster. Sooner or later, I perceive the schoolmaster on the watch. . . . Having made sure of his watching me, I tempt him on, all over London. One night I go east, another night north, in a few nights I go all round the compass . . . I study and get up abstruse No Thoroughfares in the course of the day. With Venetian mystery I seek those No Thoroughfares at night, glide into them by means of dark courts, tempt the schoolmaster to follow, turn suddenly, and catch him before he can retreat. Then we face one another, and I pass him as unaware of his existence, and he undergoes grinding torments . . . Night after night his disappointment is acute, but hope springs eternal in the scholastic breast, and he follows me again to-morrow. Thus I enjoy the pleasures of the chase, and derive great benefit from the healthful exercise. When I do not enjoy the pleasures of the chase, for anything I know he watches at the Temple Gate all night.”

* * * * *

‘The state of the man was murderous, and he knew it. More, he irritated it, with a kind of perverse pleasure akin to that which a sick man sometimes has in irritating a wound upon his body. Tied up all day with his disciplined

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show upon him . . . he broke loose at night like an ill-tamed wild animal . . . If great criminals told the truth—which, being great criminals, they do not—they would very rarely tell of their struggles against the crime. Their struggles are towards it . . . This man perfectly comprehended that he hated his rival with his strongest and worst forces, and that if he tracked him to Lizzie Hexam, his so doing would never serve himself with her, or serve her . . . And he knew well what act of his would follow if he did.'

It was at the conclusion of one of these chases that ended at the Temple Gate, that Riderhood and Headstone met. From him Bradley learned a little more about Wrayburn and Lizzie, and incidentally that Riderhood was now deputy lock keeper up the river, and anxious for Wrayburn to use his influence to get him appointed as the official keeper.

IV

THE DISGUISE

To be safe from even the mild persecutions of her lover, Eugene Wrayburn, Lizzie Hexam obtains a situation some distance from London, at a Paper Mill near Plash-water Weir Mill Lock, where Riderhood is now the Lock-keeper.

Eugene, however, finds out her sanctuary and follows her, to be followed in turn by Bradley Headstone on foot, disguised as a bargeman. At the lock he is recognised by Riderhood, in spite of his "rough water-side second-hand clothing."

" "Wish I may die," said Riderhood, smiting his right leg, and laughing, as he sat on the grass, "if you ain't ha' been a-imitating me, T'otherest governor! Never thought myself so good-looking afore!"

Truly, Bradley Headstone had taken careful note of the honest man's dress in the course of that night-walk they had had together. He must have committed it to memory, and slowly got it by heart. It was exactly reproduced in the dress he now wore. And whereas, in his own schoolmaster clothes, he usually looked as if they were the clothes of some

other man, he now looked, in the clothes of some other man, or men, as if they were his own.'

This was the whole diabolical plan of the jealous schoolmaster; he would pursue his rival in the guise of Riderhood, set upon him, and kill him, trusting to good luck that if seen he would be recognised as the Lock-keeper, and suspicion would be diverted accordingly.

"These are my holidays," he explained to Riderhood, adding "and I have never left him since they began. And I never will leave him now, till I have seen him with her."

"And when you have seen him with her?" said Riderhood.

"—I'll come back to you."

Two sovereigns pass from Headstone to Riderhood, a sort of hush money more or less demanded by the latter, and then the Schoolmaster departs.

"Now, I must follow him," said Bradley Headstone. "He takes this river-road—the fool!—to confuse observation, or divert attention, if not solely to baffle me. But he must have the power of making himself invisible before he can shake Me off."

Riderhood was sorely troubled by the attempt on the part of Headstone to copy his dress. Was it done by accident, he asked himself. To make sure he set a trap, changing his own colourless tie for a "conspicuous bright-red neckerchief stained black here and there with wear, the loose ends flowing." He felt elated by his device.

"Now," said the Rogue, "if arter he sees me in this neckhankecher, I see him in a similar neckhankecher, it won't be accident!"

In a few hours Headstone returned, saying "He has put up for the night, at an Angler's Inn. He goes on, up the river, at six in the morning. I have come back for a couple of hours' rest."

Over supper Rogue Riderhood made as much display of his new adornment as it was possible to do.

'The dragging ends of the red neckerchief caught the schoolmaster's eyes. Riderhood saw him look at it.

"Oh!" thought that worthy. "You're a-taking notice, are you? Come! You shall have a good squint at it then." With which reflection he sat down on the other side of the

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table, threw open his vest, and made a pretence of re-tying the neckerchief with much deliberation.

Riderhood saw him, again and again, steal a look at the neckerchief, as if he were correcting his slow observation and prompting his sluggish memory.'

The next day Eugene met Lizzie on the river's bank, and Bradley Headstone watched, concealed behind the trees. The lovers parted, and then Eugene was felled to the ground with a crushing blow that was meant to be his death, and fell insensible into the river. His one cry for help was heard by Lizzie Hexam, and her old river experience with her father now stood her in good stead, and she was able to rescue her lover and save his life.

Meanwhile Bradley Headstone returned to the Lock-house, and again partook of refreshment and rest. The deep scheming villain now perpetrated the final step in his diabolical plan to throw suspicion on Riderhood. He deliberately cut his hand (only he was clever enough to make it appear as if by accident) and let some of the blood fall on the coat of Riderhood.

It did not need the crafty senses of Riderhood to tell him what Headstone had been about, and the whole murderous plan was laid bare to him when he saw how far his own trap had been successful. When Headstone at length went to sleep

'Softly and slowly, he opened the coat and drew it back.

The draggling ends of a bright-red neckerchief were then disclosed, and he had even been at the pains of dipping parts of it in some liquid, to give it the appearance of having become stained by wear. With a much-perplexed face, Riderhood looked from it to the sleeper, and from the sleeper to it, and finally crept back to his chair, and there, with his hand to his chin, sat long in a brown study, looking at both.'

The next day Headstone departed; but he was followed by the Rogue, who watched him change in a secluded part of the river and threw his bundle of old clothes into the middle of the stream. Whether to follow on or to go fishing was the next point for Riderhood to decide; he already knew where the schoolmaster lived, so he decided to fish, and was busy with the river all next day.

‘He had fished with assiduity on the previous evening, but the light was short, and he had fished unsuccessfully. He had fished again that day with better luck, and had carried his fish home to Plashwater Weir Mill Lock-house, in a bundle. . . .

The miserable man whom he had released for the time, but not for long, went on towards London. Bradley was suspicious of every sound he heard, and of every face he saw, but was under a spell which very commonly falls upon the shedder of blood, and had no suspicion of the real danger that lurked in his life, and would have it yet. Riderhood was much in his thoughts—had never been out of his thoughts since the night-adventure of their first meeting; but Riderhood occupied a very different place there, from the place of pursuer; and Bradley had been at the pains of devising so many means of fitting that place to him, and of wedging him into it, that his mind could not compass the possibility of his occupying any other. And this is another spell against which the shedder of blood for ever strives in vain.’

V

ON THE TRACK

Rogue Riderhood was not the sort of man who would let grass grow under his feet. As soon as he was able to obtain a relief man he hastened to London, to the school where the murderer was then actually engaged in teaching his scholars, and with many suggestive remarks made Headstone realise that he knew his guilty secret, and expected him at once at the Lock-house to talk things over, which to Riderhood had only one real meaning, Money.

Accordingly Bradley arrived at the Lock-house once again, and here the final tragic scene was enacted.

“‘You don’t need to be told I am here,” said Bradley. . . .
“I wish to know what you want with me.”

“And you shall.” Riderhood had looked hard at his hands and his pockets, apparently as a precautionary measure lest he should have any weapon about him. But he now leaned forward, turning the collar of his waistcoat with an inquisitive finger, and asked, “Why, where’s your watch?”

“I have left it behind.”

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“I want it. But it can be fetched. I’ve took a fancy to it.”

Bradley answered with a contemptuous laugh.

“I want it,” repeated Riderhood, in a louder voice, “and I mean to have it.”

“That is what you want of me, is it?”

“No,” said Riderhood, still louder; “it’s only part of what I want of you. I want money of you.”

“Anything else?”

“Everything else!” roared Riderhood, in a very loud and furious way. “Answer me like that, and I won’t talk to you at all.”

Bradley looked at him.

“Don’t so much as look at me like that, or I won’t talk to you at all,” vociferated Riderhood. “But, instead of talking, I’ll bring my hand down upon you with all its weight,” heavily smiting the table with great force, “and smash you!”

“Go on,” said Bradley, after moistening his lips.

“Oh! I’m a-going on. Don’t you fear but I’ll go on full fast enough for you, and fur enough for you, without your telling. Look here, Bradley Headstone, Master. You might have split the T’other governor to chips and wedges without my caring, . . . but when you copied my clothes, and when you copied my neckhankercher, and when you shook blood upon me after you had done the trick, you did wot I’ll be paid for and paid heavy for. If it come to be throw’d upon you, you was to be ready to throw it upon me, was you? Where else but in Plashwater Weir Mill Lock was there a man dressed according as described? Where else but in Plashwater Weir Mill Lock was there a man as had had words with him coming through in his boat? Look at the Lock-keeper in Plashwater Weir Mill Lock, in them same answering clothes, and with that same answering red neckhankercher, and see whether his clothes happens to be bloody or not. Yes, they do happen to be bloody. Ah, you sly devil!”

Bradley, very white, sat looking at him in silence.

“But two could play at your game,” said Riderhood, snapping his fingers at him half a dozen times. . . . I see you with my own eyes take your own clothes from their hiding-place among them felled trees. . . . I hooked your Bargeman’s bundle out of the river. . . . I’ve got them, and I’ve got you. I don’t care a curse for the T’other governor, alive or dead, but I care a many curses for my own self. And as you laid your plots agin me and was a sly devil

agin me, I’ll be paid for it—I’ll be paid for it—I’ll be paid for it—till I’ve drained you dry!”

Bradley looked at the fire with a working face, and was silent for a while. At last he said, with what seemed an inconsistent composure of voice and feature:

“You can’t get blood out of a stone, Riderhood.”

“I can get money out of a schoolmaster though.”

“You can’t get out of me what is not in me. You can’t wrest from me what I have not got. Mine is but a poor calling. You have had more than two guineas from me, already. . . .”

“Yours is a ’spectable calling. To save your ’spectability, it’s worth your while to pawn every article of clothes you’ve got, sell every stick in your house, and beg and borrow every penny you can get trusted with. When you’ve done that and handed over, I’ll leave you. Not afore.”

“How do you mean, you’ll leave me?”

“I mean as I’ll keep you company, wherever you go, when you go away from here. Let the Lock take care of itself. I’ll take care of you, once I’ve got you.”

In vain does Headstone offer him his purse with all the money he has—his watch—and a promise to pay a certain sum each quarter when his salary is paid: Riderhood refuses to run the risk of letting him slip through his fingers.

The whole night long “grasping his left wrist with his right hand,” Headstone sat, “rigidly contemplating the fire”; and as fixedly did Riderhood watch him. When morning came at last

‘Without a sign Bradley walked out of the Lock-house. Catching up from the table a piece of bread, and taking his Bargeman’s bundle under his arm, Riderhood immediately followed him. Bradley turned towards London. Riderhood caught him up, and walked at his side.

The two men trudged on, side by side, in silence, full three miles. Suddenly, Bradley turned to retrace his course. Instantly, Riderhood turned likewise, and they went back side by side.’

VI

THE FINAL STRUGGLE AT THE LOCK HOUSE

'Bradley re-entered the Lock-house. So did Riderhood. Bradley sat down in the window. Riderhood warmed himself at the fire. After an hour or more, Bradley abruptly got up again, and again went out, but this time turned the other way. Riderhood was close after him, caught him up in few paces, and walked at his side.

This time, as before, when he found his attendant not to be shaken off, Bradley suddenly turned back. This time, as before, Riderhood turned back along with him. But not this time, as before, did they go into the Lock-house, for Bradley came to a stand on the snow-covered turf by the Lock, looking up the river and down the river. Navigation was impeded by the frost, and the scene was a mere white and yellow desert.

"Come, come, Master," urged Riderhood, at his side. "This is a dry game. And where's the good of it? You can't get rid of me, except by coming to a settlement. I am a-going along with you wherever you go."

Without a word of reply, Bradley passed quickly from him over the wooden bridge on the Lock gates. "Why, there's even less sense in this move than t'other," said Riderhood, following. "The Weir's there, and you'll have to come back, you know."

Without taking the least notice, Bradley leaned his body against a post, in a resting attitude, and there rested with his eyes cast down. "Being brought here," said Riderhood, gruffly, "I'll turn it to some use by changing my gates." With a rattle and a rush of water, he then swung-to the Lock gates that were standing open, before opening the others. So both sets of gates were, for the moment, closed.

"You'd better by far be reasonable, Bradley Headstone, Master," said Riderhood, passing him, "or I'll drain you all the drier for it, when we do settle.—Ah! Would you?"

Bradley had caught him round the body. He seemed to be girdled with an iron ring. They were on the brink of the Lock, about midway between the two sets of gates.

"Let go!" said Riderhood, "or I'll get my knife out and slash you wherever I can cut you. Let go!"



‘I’ll hold you living, and I’ll hold you dead’.

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Bradley was drawing to the Lock-edge. Riderhood was drawing away from it. It was a strong grapple, and a fierce struggle, arm and leg. Bradley got him round, with his back to the Lock, and still worked him backwards.

“Let go!” said Riderhood. “Stop! What are you trying at? You can’t drown me. Ain’t I told you that the man as has come through drowning can never be drowned? I can’t be drowned.”

“I can be!” returned Bradley, in a desperate, clenched voice. “I am resolved to be. I’ll hold you living, and I’ll hold you dead. Come down!”

Riderhood went over into the smooth pit backward, and Bradley Headstone upon him. When the two were found, lying under the ooze and scum behind one of the rotting gates, Riderhood’s hold had relaxed, probably in falling, and his eyes were staring upward. But he was girdled still with Bradley’s iron ring, and the rivets of the iron ring held tight.’



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THAT HEEP OF INFAMY

I

URIAH HEEP

URIAH HEEP, the great fictional representative of hypocrisy, Uriah Heep, the crawler, the impostor, the cheat and the forger, was only a lad of fifteen, office boy and junior clerk to the lawyer Wickfield at Canterbury, when David Copperfield first made his acquaintance. He had "a cadaverous face" and was older than he looked. His red hair was "cropped as close as the closest stubble"; he had hardly any eyebrows, and no eyelashes, and "eyes of a red-brown, so unsheltered and unshaded, that I remember wondering how he went to sleep. He was high-shouldered and bony; dressed in decent black, with a white wisp of a neckcloth; buttoned up to the throat; and had a long, lank, skeleton hand, which particularly attracted my attention, as he stood at the pony's head, rubbing his chin with it, and looking up at us in the chaise. . . ."

The glimpse David had of him after he had alighted from the chaise and left Uriah with the pony was essentially

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characteristic: it was of him "breathing into the pony's nostrils, and immediately covering them with his hand, as if he were putting some spell upon him."

Such is the hopeful beginning of the life story of this epitome of baseless humility, completely and engrossingly unfolded to us in the subsequent pages.

II

HUMILITY

David's first interview with Uriah was that same evening.

"I found Uriah reading a great fat book, with such demonstrative attention, that his lank forefinger followed up every line as he read, and made clammy tracks along the page (or so I fully believed) like a snail.

"You are working late to-night, Uriah," says I.

"Yes, Master Copperfield," says Uriah.

As I was getting on the stool opposite, to talk to him more conveniently, I observed that he had not such a thing as a smile about him, and that he could only widen his mouth and make two hard creases down his cheeks, one on each side, to stand for one.

"I am not doing office-work, Master Copperfield," said Uriah.

"What work, then?" I asked.

"I am improving my legal knowledge, Master Copperfield," said Uriah. "I am going through Tidd's Practice. Oh, what a writer Mr. Tidd is, Master Copperfield!"

My stool was such a tower of observation, that as I watched him reading on again, after this rapturous exclamation, and following up the lines with his forefinger, I observed that his nostrils, which were thin and pointed, with sharp dints in them, had a singular and most uncomfortable way of expanding and contracting themselves; that they seemed to twinkle instead of his eyes, which hardly ever twinkled at all.

"I suppose you are quite a great lawyer?" I said, after looking at him for some time.

"Me, Master Copperfield?" said Uriah. "Oh, no! I'm a very umble person."

It was no fancy of mine about his hands, I observed; for he frequently ground the palms against each other as if to

squeeze them dry and warm, besides often wiping them, in a stealthy way, on his pocket-handkerchief.

"I am well aware that I am the umblest person going," said Uriah Heep, modestly; "let the other be where he may. My mother is likewise a very umble person. We live in an umble abode, Master Copperfield, but have much to be thankful for. My father's former calling was umble. He was a sexton."

"What is he now?" I asked.

"He is a partaker of glory at present, Master Copperfield," said Uriah Heep. "But we have much to be thankful for. How much have I to be thankful for in living with Mr. Wickfield!"

I asked Uriah if he had been with Mr. Wickfield long?

"I have been with him going on four year, Master Copperfield," said Uriah; shutting up his book, after carefully marking the place where he had left off. "Since a year after my father's death. How much have I to be thankful for, in that! How much have I to be thankful for, in Mr. Wickfield's kind intention to give me my articles, which would otherwise not lay within the umble means of mother and self!"

"Then, when your articed time is over, you'll be a regular lawyer, I suppose?" said I.

"With the blessing of Providence, Master Copperfield," returned Uriah.

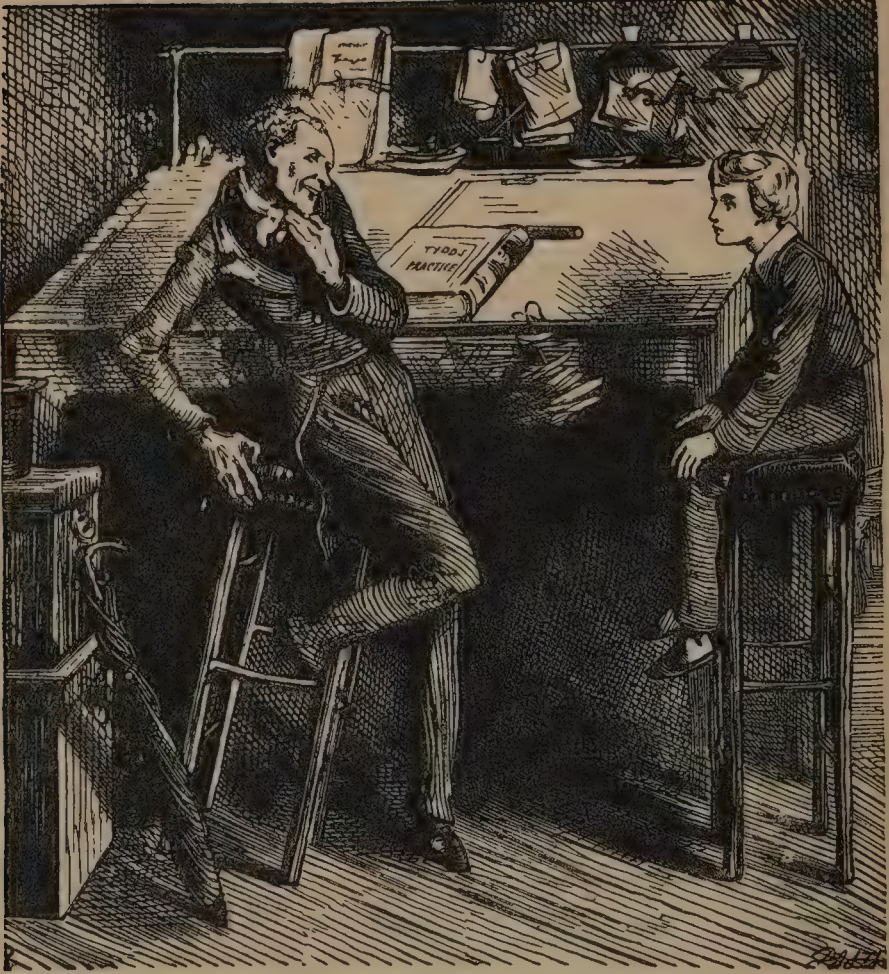
"Perhaps you'll be a partner in Mr. Wickfield's business, one of these days," I said, to make myself agreeable; "and it will be Wickfield and Heep, or Heep late Wickfield."

"Oh no, Master Copperfield," returned Uriah, shaking his head, "I am much too umble for that!"

He certainly did look uncommonly like the carved face on the beam outside my window, as he sat, in his humility, eyeing me sideways, with his mouth widened, and the creases in his cheeks. . . .

He writhed himself quite off his stool in the excitement of his feelings, and, being off, began to make arrangements for going home.

"Mother will be expecting me," he said, referring to a pale, inexpressive-faced watch in his pocket, "and getting uneasy; for though we are very umble, Master Copperfield, we are much attached to one another. If you would come and see us, any afternoon, and take a cup of tea at our lowly



"Oh no, Master Copperfield, I'm much too umble."

dwelling, mother would be as proud of your company as I should be."

I said I should be glad to come.

"Thank you, Master Copperfield," returned Uriah, putting his book away upon the shelf. . . . After shaking hands with me—his hand felt like a fish, in the dark—he opened the door into the street a very little, and crept out, and shut it, leaving me to grope my way back into the house.'

Mrs. Heep was a worthy mother of such a son, as may be gathered from the description of what happened when David paid them his promised visit to tea.

'I found that Mrs. Heep gradually got nearer to me, and that Uriah gradually got opposite to me, and that they respectfully plied me with the choicest of the eatables on the table. There was nothing particularly choice there, to be sure; but I took the will for the deed, and felt that they were very attentive. Presently they began to talk about aunts, and then I told them about mine; and about fathers and mothers, and then I told them about mine; and then Mrs. Heep began to talk about fathers-in-law, and then I began to tell her about mine; but stopped, because my aunt had advised me to observe silence on that subject. A tender young cork, however, would have had no more chance against a pair of corkscrews, or a tender young tooth against a pair of dentists, or a little shuttlecock against two battledores, than I had against Uriah and Mrs. Heep. They did just what they liked with me; and wormed things out of me that I had no desire to tell, with a certainty I blush to think of: the more especially as, in my juvenile frankness, I took some credit to myself for being so confidential, and felt that I was quite the patron of my two respectful entertainers.'

III

PARTNERSHIP

By the time David Copperfield had finished his schooling at Canterbury, and had followed it by a short time in London, Uriah Heep had so wormed his way into the confidence of his master, had so played upon his weakness for Port, that

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a partnership became inevitable. It was from Agnes Wickfield that David learnt:

“He had told papa that he was going away; that he was very sorry and unwilling to leave, but that he had better prospects. Papa was very much depressed then, but he seemed relieved by this expedient of the partnership, though at the same time he seemed hurt by it and ashamed of it. . . . His ascendancy over papa is very great. He professes humility and gratitude—with truth, perhaps: I hope so—but his position is really one of power, and I fear he makes a hard use of his power.”

And then Uriah himself expanded with crafty pride, not unmixed with a hint as to the course of his future conduct as the vital head of the firm.

“What a prophet you have shown yourself, Mister Copperfield!” pursued Uriah. “Dear me, what a prophet you have proved yourself to be! Don’t you remember saying to me once, that perhaps I should be a partner in Mr. Wickfield’s business, and perhaps it might be Wickfield and Heep? *You* may not recollect it; but when a person is umble, Master Copperfield, a person treasures such things up! . . .

“The umblest persons, Master Copperfield,” he presently resumed, “may be the instruments of good. I am glad to think I have been the instrument of good to Mr. Wickfield, and that I may be more so. Oh what a worthy man he is, Mister Copperfield, but how impudent he has been! . . .

“Ah! Great impudence, Master Copperfield. It’s a topic that I wouldn’t touch upon, to any soul but you. Even to you I can only touch upon it, and no more. If any one else had been in my place during the last few years, by this time he would have had Mr. Wickfield (oh, what a worthy man he is, Master Copperfield, too!) under his thumb. Un—der—his thumb,” said Uriah, very slowly, as he stretched out his cruel-looking hand above my table, and pressed his own thumb down upon it, until it shook, and shook the room.

If I had been obliged to look at him with his splay foot on Mr. Wickfield’s head, I think I could scarcely have hated him more.

"Oh, dear, yes, Master Copperfield," he proceeded, in a soft voice, most remarkably contrasting with the action of his thumb, which did not diminish its hard pressure in the least degree, "there's no doubt of it. There would have been loss, disgrace, I don't know what all. Mr. Wickfield knows it. I am the umble instrument of umbly serving him, and he puts me on an eminence I hardly could have hoped to reach. How thankful should I be!" With his face turned towards me, as he finished, but without looking at me, he took his crooked thumb off the spot where he had planted it, and slowly and thoughtfully scraped his lank jaw with it, as if he were shaving himself.

I recollect well how indignantly my heart beat, as I saw his crafty face, with the appropriately red light of the fire upon it, preparing for something else.'

His next step was to acquire a hold on the affections of his partner's daughter. "With what affection do I love the ground my Agnes walks on," he declared to David, much to the latter's disgust, adding,

"You see I am only just emerging from my lowly station. I rest a good deal of hope on her observing how useful I am to her father (for I trust to be very useful to him indeed Master Copperfield), and how I smooth the way for him, and keep him straight. She's so much attached to her father, Master Copperfield (oh what a lovely thing it is in a daughter!), that I think she may come, on his account, to be kind to me."

"I fathomed the depth of the rascal's whole scheme, and understood why he laid it bare," remarks David Copperfield.

It was at about this time that Uriah confided to David some further details of the uses of "umbleness."

"How little you think of the rightful umbleness of a person in my station, Master Copperfield! Father and me was both brought up at a foundation school for boys; and mother, she was likewise brought up at a public, sort of charitable, establishment. They taught us all a deal of umbleness—not mush else that I know of, from morning to night. We was to be umble to this person, and umble to that; and to pull off our caps here, and to make bows

there; and always to know our place, and abase ourselves before our betters. And we had such a lot of betters! Father got the monitor-medal by being umble. So did I. Father got made a sexton by being umble. He had the character, among the gentlefolks, of being such a well-behaved man, that they were determined to bring him in. 'Be umble, Uriah,' says father to me, 'and you'll get on. It was what was always being dinned into you and me at school; it's what goes down best. Be umble,' says father, 'and you'll do!' And really it ain't done bad!"

It was the first time it had ever occurred to me that this detestable cant of false humility might have originated out of the Heep family. I had seen the harvest, but had never thought of the seed.

"When I was quite a young boy," said Uriah, "I got to know what umbleness did, and I took to it. I ate umble pie with an appetite. I stopped at the umble point of my learning, and says I, 'Hold hard!' When you offered to teach me Latin, I knew better. 'People like to be above you,' says father, 'keep yourself down.' I am very umble to the present moment, Master Copperfield, but I've got a little power!"

And he said all this—I knew, as I saw his face in the moonlight—that I might understand he was resolved to recompense himself by using his power. I had never doubted his meanness, his craft and malice; but I fully comprehended now, for the first time, what a base, unrelenting and revengeful spirit must have been engendered by this early and this long suppression.'

IV

WICKFIELD IN THE TOILS

The ascendancy of Heep over Wickfield increased daily. Falsification of books, and appropriation of clients' money followed as a natural course under the direction of Uriah. David's aunt Betsey Trotwood lost nearly the whole of her fortune by this means, but not one word would she (brave soul) utter, that would be the means of bringing shame on the head of old Wickfield and his daughter Agnes. She took all the blame on herself.

The following scene enacted one day at Mr. Wickfield's house shows to the full the villainy of Heep that was so soon to be laid bare, thanks to Mr. Micawber, who had obtained a situation in the office of Wickfield and Heep as a clerk. Uriah had seen, such was his custom at dinner, that Mr. Wickfield was well supplied with a sufficiency of wine. When he was in a maudlin condition Uriah proposed a toast to Agnes "the divinest of her sex . . . I admire—adore her . . . to be her husband . . ." "Spare me," writes David, "from ever again hearing such a cry, as that with which her father rose up from the table."

'He pointed to Uriah, pale and glowering in a corner, evidently very much out in his calculations, and taken by surprise.

"Look at my torturer," he replied. "Before him I have step by step abandoned name and reputation, peace and quiet, house and home."

"I have kept your name and reputation for you, and your peace and quiet, and your house and home too," said Uriah, with a sulky, hurried, defeated air of compromise. "Don't be foolish, Mr. Wickfield. If I have gone a little beyond what you were prepared for, I can go back, I suppose? There's no harm done."

"I looked for single motives in every one," said Mr. Wickfield, "and I was satisfied I had bound him to me by motives of interest. But see what he is—oh, see what he is!"

"You had better stop him, Copperfield, if you can," cried Uriah, with his long forefinger pointing towards me. "He'll say something presently—mind you!—he'll be sorry to have said afterwards, and you'll be sorry to have heard!"

"I'll say anything!" cried Mr. Wickfield, with a desperate air. "Why should I not be in all the world's power if I am in yours?"

"Mind! I tell you!" said Uriah, continuing to warn me. "If you don't stop his mouth, you're not his friend! Why shouldn't you be in all the world's power, Mr. Wickfield? Because you have got a daughter. You and me know what we know, don't we? Let sleeping dogs lie—who wants to rouse 'em? I don't. Can't you see I am as umble as I can be? I tell you, if I've gone too far, I'm sorry. What would you have, sir?"

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“Oh, Trotwood, Trotwood!” exclaimed Mr. Wickfield, wringing his hands. “What I have come down to be, since I first saw you in this house! . . . I have brought misery on what I dearly love, I know—*You* know!” . . .

He dropped into a chair, and weakly sobbed. The excitement into which he had been roused was leaving him. Uriah came out of his corner.

“I don’t know all I have done, in my fatuity,” said Mr. Wickfield, putting out his hands, as if to deprecate my condemnation. “*He* knows best,” meaning Uriah Heep, “for he has always been at my elbow, whispering me. You see the millstone that he is about my neck. You find him in my house, you find him in my business. You heard him, but a little time ago. What need have I to say more!”

“You haven’t need to say so much, nor half so much, nor anything at all,” observed Uriah, half defiant, and half fawning. “You wouldn’t have took it up so, if it hadn’t been for the wine. You’ll think better of it to-morrow, sir. If I have said too much, or more than I meant, what of it? I haven’t stood by it!”

The door opened, and Agnes, gliding in, without a vestige of colour in her face, put her arm round his neck, and steadily said, “Papa, you are not well. Come with me!” He laid his head upon her shoulder, as if he were oppressed with heavy shame, and went out with her. Her eyes met mine for but an instant, yet I saw how much she knew of what had passed.

“I didn’t expect he’d cut up so rough, Master Copperfield,” said Uriah. “But it’s nothing. I’ll be friends with him to-morrow. It’s for his good. I’m umbly anxious for his good.”

I gave him no answer, and went up-stairs into the quiet room where Agnes had so often sat beside me at my books.

* * * * *

It was dark in the morning when I got upon the coach at the inn door. The day was just breaking when we were about to start, and then came struggling up the coach side, through the mingled day and night, Uriah’s head.

“Copperfield!” said he, in a croaking whisper, as he hung by the iron on the roof, “I thought you’d be glad to hear, before you went off, that there are no squares broke between us. I’ve been into his room already, and we’ve

made it all smooth. Why, though I'm umble, I'm useful to him, you know; and he understands his interest when he isn't in liquor! What an agreeable man he is, after all, Master Copperfield!"

I obliged myself to say that I was glad he had made his apology.

"Oh, to be sure!" said Uriah. "When a person's umble, you know, what's an apology? So easy! I say! I suppose," with a jerk, "you have sometimes plucked a pear before it was ripe, Master Copperfield?"

"I suppose I have," I replied.

"I did that last night," said Uriah; "but it'll ripen yet! It only wants attending to. I can wait!"

Profuse in his farewells, he got down again as the coachman got up. For anything I know, he was eating something to keep the raw morning air out; but he made motions with his mouth as if the pear were ripe already, and he were smacking his lips over it.

V

MR. MICAWBER'S EXPOSURE

To Wilkins Micawber is due the complete overthrow of Uriah Heep and it was a momentous occasion when David, his aunt, Agnes and Traddles attended in the little office in Canterbury there to find Mr. Micawber at his desk, writing, or pretending to write, hard. The large office-ruler was stuck into his waistcoat, with a foot or more of it "protruding from his bosom, like a new kind of shirt-frill."

Uriah was there, too, and not a little astonished to see so many visitors.

"Things are changed in this office, Miss Trotwood, since I was an umble clerk, and held your pony; ain't they?" said Uriah, with his sickliest smile. "But *I* am not changed, Miss Trotwood."

"Well, sir," returned my aunt, "to tell you the truth, I think you are pretty constant to the promise of your youth; if that's any satisfaction to you."

"Thank you, Miss Trotwood," said Uriah, writhing in his ungainly manner, "for your good opinion! Micawber, tell 'em to let Miss Agnes know—and mother. Mother

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will be quite in a state, when she sees the present company!" said Uriah, setting chairs. . . .

"Don't wait, Micawber," said Uriah.

Mr. Micawber, with his hand upon the ruler in his breast, stood erect before the door, most unmistakably contemplating one of his fellow-men, and that man his employer.

"What are you waiting for?" said Uriah. "Micawber! did you hear me tell you not to wait?"

"Yes!" replied the immovable Mr. Micawber.

"Then why *do* you wait?" said Uriah.

"Because I—in short, choose," replied Mr. Micawber, with a burst.

Uriah's cheeks lost colour, and an unwholesome paleness, still faintly tinged by his pervading red, overspread them. He looked at Mr. Micawber attentively, with his whole face breathing short and quick in every feature.

"You are a dissipated fellow, as all the world knows," he said, with an effort at a smile, "and I am afraid you'll oblige me to get rid of you. Go along! I'll talk to you presently."

"If there is a scoundrel on this earth," said Mr. Micawber, suddenly breaking out again with the utmost vehemence, "with whom I have already talked too much, that scoundrel's name is—HEEP!"

Uriah fell back, as if he had been struck or stung. Looking slowly round upon us with the darkest and wickedest expression that his face could wear, he said, in a lower voice:

"Oho! This is a conspiracy! You have met here by appointment! You are playing Booty with my clerk, are you, Copperfield? Now, take care. You'll make nothing of this. We understand each other, you and me. There's no love between us. You were always a puppy with a proud stomach, from your first coming here; and you envy me my rise, do you? None of your plots against me; I'll counterplot you! . . .

"You are a precious set of people, ain't you? to buy over my clerk, who is the very scum of society. . . . Miss Trotwood, you had better stop this; or I'll stop your husband shorter than will be pleasant to you. I won't know your story professionally, for nothing, old lady! Miss Wickfield, if you have any love for your father, you had better not join that gang. I'll ruin him, if you do. Now, come! I have got some of you under the harrow. Think twice, before it goes over you. Think twice, you, Micawber, if

you don't want to be crushed. I recommend you to take yourself off, and be talked to presently, you fool! while there's time to retreat! Where's mother?" he said, suddenly appearing to notice, with alarm, the absence of Traddles, and pulling down the bell-rope. "Fine doings in a person's own house!"

"Mrs. Heep is here, sir," said Traddles, returning with that worthy mother of a worthy son. "I have taken the liberty of making myself known to her."

"Who are you to make yourself known?" retorted Uriah. "And what do you want here?"

"I am the agent and friend of Mr. Wickfield, sir," said Traddles, in a composed business-like way. "And I have a power of attorney from him in my pocket, to act for him in all matters."

"The old ass has drunk himself into a stage of dotage," said Uriah, turning uglier than before, "and it has been got from him by fraud!"

"Something has been got from him by fraud, I know," returned Traddles quietly; "and so do you, Mr. Heep. We will refer that question, if you please, to Mr. Micawber."

"Ury—!" Mrs. Heep began, with an anxious gesture.

"You hold your tongue, mother," he returned; "least said, soonest mended."

"But, my Ury—"

"Will you hold your tongue, mother, and leave it to me?"

Though I had long known that his servility was false, and all his pretences knavish and hollow, I had had no adequate conception of the extent of his hypocrisy until I now saw him with his mask off. The suddenness with which he dropped it, when he perceived that it was useless to him; the malice, insolence, and hatred he revealed; the leer with which he exulted, even at this moment, in the evil he had done—all this time being desperate too, and at his wits' end for the means of getting the better of us—though perfectly consistent with the experience I had of him, at first took even me by surprise, who had known him so long, and disliked him so heartily. . . .

After some rubbing of the lower part of his face, and some looking at us with those bad eyes, over his gristly fingers, he made one more address to me, half whining, and half abusive.

"You think it justifiable, do you, Copperfield, you who pride yourself so much on your honour, and all the rest of

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it, to sneak about my place, eaves-dropping with my clerk? If it had been *me*, I shouldn't have wondered; for I don't make myself out a gentleman (though I never was in the streets either, as you were, according to Micawber), but being *you!*—And you're not afraid of doing this, either? You don't think at all of what I shall do, in return; or of getting yourself into trouble for conspiracy and so forth? Very well. We shall see!

Mr. Micawber, whose impetuosity I had restrained thus far with the greatest difficulty, and who had repeatedly interposed with the first syllable of SCOUN-drel! without getting to the second, now burst forward, drew the ruler from his breast (apparently as a defensive weapon), and produced from his pocket a foolscap document, folded in the form of a large letter. Opening this packet, with his old flourish, and glancing at the contents, as if he cherished an artistic admiration of their style of composition.'

Micawber then proceeded to denounce what he styled "probably the most consummate villain that has ever existed—Heep the forger and the cheat". With his usual flamboyancy of language, he explained how he entered into the service of the firm at a "pittance of twenty-two shillings and six per week"; that his poverty soon rendered it necessary for him to seek pecuniary advances from Heep, and so did he become immeshed in the web that had been spun for his reception. Then he finds that his "services were constantly called into requisition for the falsification of business" and the mystification of Mr. Wickfield. When Mr. Wickfield was the least fit to transact business, then was there business to be transacted, and documents of importance were put before him for signature represented as documents of no importance. In this way was trust money dealt with, to settle non-existent accounts, and the whole proceedings were thus represented as being the dishonest acts of the senior partner.

"You shall prove this, you Copperfield!" said Uriah, with a threatening shake of the head. "All in good time!"

"Ask—HEEP—Mr. Traddles, who lived in his house after him," said Mr. Micawber, breaking off from the letter; "will you?"

"The fool himself—and lives there now," said Uriah, disdainfully.

"Ask—HEEP—if he ever kept a pocket-book in that house," said Mr. Micawber; "will you?"

I saw Uriah's lank hand stop, involuntarily, in the scraping of his chin.

"Or ask him," said Mr. Micawber, "if he ever burnt one there. If he says Yes, and asks you where the ashes are, refer him to Wilkins Micawber, and he will hear of something not at all to his advantage!"

The triumphant flourish with which Mr. Micawber delivered himself of these words, had a powerful effect in alarming the mother; who cried out in much agitation:

"Ury, Ury! Be umble, and make terms, my dear!"

"Mother!" he retorted, "will you keep quiet? You're in a fright, and don't know what you say or mean. Uumble!" he repeated, looking at me, with a snarl; "I've umbled some of 'em for a pretty long time back, umble as I was!"

Continuing his charges Mr. Micawber went on to say that he had in his possession a pocket book belonging to Heep in which appeared several attempts at imitating Mr. Wickfield's signature which had been only partially destroyed by fire, and that he could now prove by the series of false books and Heep's own memoranda, also in his possession that Mr. Wickfield had been "for years deluded and plundered in every conceivable manner to the pecuniary aggrandisement of the avaricious, false and grasping Heep."

Under threats of gaol a deed of relinquishment was forced from Uriah, and his final exit from the scene was of a dramatic nature;

'Uriah, without lifting his eyes from the ground, shuffled across the room with his hand to his chin, and pausing at the door, said:

"Copperfield, I have always hated you. You've always been an upstart, and you've always been against me."

"As I think I told you once before," said I, "it is you who have been, in your greed and cunning, against all the world. It may be profitable to you to reflect, in future, that there never were greed and cunning in the world yet, that did not do too much, and over-reach themselves. It is as certain as death."

"Or as certain as they used to teach at school (the same school where I picked up so much umbleness), from nine o'clock to eleven, that labour was a curse; and from eleven o'clock to one, that it was a blessing and a cheerfulness, and a dignity, and I don't know what all, eh?" said he with a sneer.

“You preach, about as consistent as they did. Won’t umbleness go down? I shouldn’t have got round my gentleman fellow-partner without it, I think—Micawber, you old bully, I’ll pay *you!*”

VI

AN INTERESTING PENITENT

Our final glimpse of Uriah Heep is in the model prison which David Copperfield visited some years later where he says:

‘I found a vast amount of profession, varying very little in character: varying very little (which I thought exceedingly suspicious) even in words. I found a great many foxes, disparaging whole vineyards of inaccessible grapes; but I found very few foxes whom I would have trusted within reach of a bunch. Above all, I found that the most professing men were the greatest objects of interest: and that their conceit, their vanity, their want of excitement, and their love of deception (which many of them possessed to an almost incredible extent, as their histories showed), all prompted to these professions, and were all gratified by them.

However, I heard so repeatedly, in the course of our goings to and fro, of a certain Number Twenty Seven, who was the favourite, and who really appeared to be a Model Prisoner, that I resolved to suspend my judgment until I should see Twenty Seven. . . .

I heard so much of Twenty Seven, of his pious admonitions to everybody around him, and of the beautiful letters he constantly wrote to his mother (whom he seemed to consider in a very bad way), that I became quite impatient to see him.

I had to restrain my impatience for some time, on account of Twenty Seven being reserved for a concluding effect. But at last we came to the door of his cell; and Mr. Creakle, looking through a little hole in it, reported to us, in a state of the greatest admiration, that he was reading a Hymn Book.

There was such a rush of heads immediately, to see Number Twenty Seven reading his Hymn Book, that the

little hole was blocked up, six or seven heads deep. To remedy this inconvenience, and give us an opportunity of conversing with Twenty Seven in all his purity, Mr. Creakle directed the door of the cell to be unlocked, and Twenty Seven to be invited out into the passage. This was done; and whom should Traddles and I then behold, to our amazement, in this converted Number Twenty Seven, but Uriah Heep!

He knew us directly; and said, as he came out—with the old writhe,—

“How do you do, Mr. Copperfield? How do you do, Mr. Traddles?”

This recognition caused a general admiration in the party. I rather thought that every one was struck by his not being proud, and taking notice of us.

“Well, Twenty Seven,” said Mr. Creakle, mournfully admiring him. “How do you find yourself to-day?”

“I am very umble, sir!” replied Uriah Heep.

“You are always so, Twenty Seven,” said Mr. Creakle. Here, another gentleman asked, with extreme anxiety: “Are you quite comfortable?”

“Yes, I thank you, sir!” said Uriah Heep, looking in that direction. “Far more comfortable here, than ever I was outside. . . . I have committed follies, gentlemen,” said Uriah, looking round with a meek smile, “and I ought to bear the consequences without repining.”

A murmur of gratification at Twenty Seven’s celestial state of mind . . . having subsided, Twenty Seven stood in the midst of us, as if he felt himself the principal object of merit in a highly meritorious museum. . . .

“Before I come here,” said Uriah, stealing a look at us, as if he would have blighted the outer world to which we belonged, if he could, “I was given to follies; but now I am sensible of my follies. There’s a deal of sin outside. . . . There’s nothing but sin everywhere—except here.”

“You are quite changed?” said Mr. Creakle.

“Oh dear, yes, sir!” cried this hopeful penitent.

“You wouldn’t relapse, if you were going out?” asked somebody else.

“Oh de-ar no, sir!”

“Well!” said Mr. Creakle, “this is very gratifying. You have addressed Mr. Copperfield, Twenty Seven. Do you wish to say anything further to him?”

"You knew me a long time before I came here and was changed, Mr. Copperfield," said Uriah, looking at me; and a more villainous look I never saw, even on his visage. "You knew me when, in spite of my follies, I was umble among them that was proud, and meek among them that was violent—you was violent to me yourself, Mr. Copperfield. Once, you struck me a blow in the face, you know."

General commiseration. Several indignant glances directed at me.

"But I forgive you, Mr. Copperfield," said Uriah, making his forgiving nature the subject of a most impious and awful parallel, which I shall not record. "I forgive everybody. It would ill become me to bear malice. I freely forgive you, and I hope you'll curb your passions in future. I hope Mr. W. will repent, and Miss W., and all of that sinful lot. You've been visited with affliction, and I hope it may do you good; but you'd better have come here. Mr. W. had better have come here, and Miss W. too. The best wish I could give you, Mr. Copperfield, and give all of you gentlemen, is, that you could be took up and brought here. When I think of my past follies, and my present state, I am sure it would be best for you. I pity all who ain't brought here!"

He sneaked back into his cell, amidst a little chorus of approbation; and both Traddles and I experienced a great relief when he was locked in. . . .

"Do you know," said I, as we walked along the passage, 'what felony was Number Twenty Seven's last 'folly'?"

The answer was that it was a Bank case.

"A fraud on the Bank of England?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. Fraud, forgery, and conspiracy. He and some others. He set the others on. It was a deep plot for a large sum. Sentence, transportation for life. Twenty Seven was the knowingest bird of the lot, and had very nearly kept himself safe; but not quite. The Bank was just able to put salt upon his tail—and only just."

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